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THE EMBEZZLERS

VALENTINE KATAEV

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Translated by

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NOTE

The scene is laid partly in Moscow, partly in Leningrad, and in various public conveyances.

The chief personages of the story, in the order of their appearance, are as follows:

PHILIP STEPHANOVITCH PROHOROFF, *respectable chief accountant for one of the Soviet trusts in Moscow. He has a soul above accounting.*

NIKITA, *the "messenger." We would call him an adult office boy.*

YOUNG IVAN, *the cashier. Once a country boy, but he prefers to appear sophisticated.*

SERGEEVNA, *a charwoman.*

YANINOCHKA, *wife of Prohoroff. She has a past, and can hold her own in an argument.*

NICOLAI, *son of Prohoroff and Yaninochka.*

ZOYA or ZOIKA, *daughter of Yaninochka.*

ISABELLA, *a harpy of wide experience and many expedients.*

MOURKA, *one of her running mates.*

GEORGE, *courier for "The Gang."*

IRENE, *the "Princess," one of "The Gang."*

COMRADE KASHKADAMOFF, *a book agent. He works a highly profitable side-line.*

WIDOW KLUVKIN, *Young Ivan's mother.*

GRUSHA, *Young Ivan's sister.*

ALYOSHKA, *a resourceful cabman.*
SAZANOFF, *President of the local Soviet in young Ivan's home town.*
DANILO, *a simple minded young peasant, engaged to Grusha.*
"ENGINEER" SHOLTE, *a mysterious fellow. He sees more than he tells.*

THE EMBEZZLERS

CHAPTER I

JUST AS the minute hand of the round clock over the roof of the *Moscow Telegraph* showed ten minutes to ten a.m., a middle-aged citizen emerged from flat "A." He was wearing goloshes, a heavy overcoat with astrachan collar, and a flat astrachan hat with flaps stretched to the front. Opening his umbrella, with pear-shaped tassels, he trudged through the slush across the noisy street, pausing before the stall of a cigarette dealer who had installed himself on the staircase of the *Telegraph*. The dealer, an old man wearing a blue cap on which appeared in silver lettering the word "Kioske," and with grey hair protruding over the top of his Scotch plaid, on seeing the citizen, thrust his hand under the wet awning and handed over to him a packet of "Era" cigarettes.

"Won't they be wet?" asked the citizen,

sniffing with his rather long nose the unclean air, redolent with the smell of town rain and the gas of the street lamps.

"Don't be afraid, they are from the bottom. What weather!"

Having received this explanation the citizen handed over twenty-four kopeks, heaved a sigh and put the pink packet of cigarettes in his trouser pocket and remarked:

"What weather!"

Then he enveloped himself in his overcoat and continued past the Post Office and down the Meat Market to his place of employment.

Actually it is no longer called the Meat Market, but the First of May Street. But who —in the middle of November, in the dull morning hours, when drizzling Moscow rain monotonously and unceasingly pours down upon the passers-by, when impossibly long tree trunks, carried one knows not whither, rumble along on a lorry, trying at each bend in the street to catch your face with the sharp ends of their branches, when with downcast head you run unexpectedly into an electric standard

erected in the middle of the pavement, when dangling harness strikes you on the shoulder, and the passing vehicles send up streams of mud to cover your already dirty coat tails, when the glistening name-plates of the companies blind you with their terrifying gold lettering, when the grindstones, saws and hay-cutting machines seem ready at any moment to break through the plate-glass windows behind which they are exhibited and cut you to pieces, when every turn reeks of gas escaping from broken pipes, and when green lamps have to burn all day over the desks of the office workers—who on earth can call the street by any such new name?

No, this street was and will remain the Meat Market. It was so called at the beginning of its existence, and none other, however descriptive, will ever stick to it.

The citizen turned into a side street and entered the door of the first house on the corner. Here he shook and closed his umbrella, reading with disgust as he stamped his goloshes on the metal scraping mat last year's

announcements of the sports club, daubed in blue paint on a long strip of wallpaper. Then he leisurely went up the soiled marble staircase to the third floor, entered an open door on the left and walked along a rather dark corridor until he reached the office, turning first to the right and then to the left, peering on his way into a cubicle where the charwoman and messenger drank their tea and talked of the world flood, and finally reached the door of his bureau, a large room, with plate-glass windows reaching from ceiling to floor, with a wooden counter stretching from end to end, and furnished with tables placed together in pairs.

The citizen opened the swing door of the bureau, glancing as he passed at the invoice clerk, a haughty girl in knitted blue jacket like that of a hussar, who at the moment was busy checking, swept his moustache over a pile of orders in the hands of a ginger-haired youth, spat in the blue spittoon, and then went along to the cubicle in the corner, partitioned off in

glass and bearing on the door a typed notice:

CHIEF ACCOUNTANT:

PHILIP STEPHANOVITCH PROHOROFF.

Then, leaning with one hand on the wall, he eased off with apparent effort his goloshes and unfastened his woollen scarf. At the same time the messenger entered the room and placed a glass of tea on the red cloth which covered the chief accountant's writing-table.

The messenger appeared in the mood for conversation.

"Would you like to have a look at the newspaper?" said he as he hung the chief accountant's overcoat on a nail.

"The newspaper?"

Philip Stephanovitch winked meaningly with a liverish eye, seated himself at the table, drew from his pocket the packet of cigarettes, wiped with his handkerchief his long greenish moustache which sat as if on horseback over his bare chin, with a tassel hanging over the

lower lip. By this action he indicated that he was not unwilling to talk.

"And what is there of interest in it, Nikita?" said he.

Nikita placed the umbrella in a corner, leaned back against the side of the door and said:

"A lot can be of interest, Philip Stephanovitch, don't you worry."

The chief accountant took one of the long cigarettes from the packet, tapped his cigarette-holder several times on the table, lighted the cigarette, turned round in his wooden armchair and winked his other liverish eye.

"For example?"

"For example, Philip Stephanovitch, it contains some quite interesting criticism of the actions of the Soviet authorities."

"Eh, Nikita," remarked the chief accountant, with apparent feeling of high superiority and pity. "I wonder why they ever taught you to read and write. What sort of a newspaper reader are you if you can't understand what you read?"

"No, Philip Stephanovitch, I can understand all right; why should one read if one cannot understand? Very interesting criticism can be found there sometimes."

"What sort of criticism can there be?"

Nikita changed from one foot to the other and slyly remarked:

"There is such a criticism concerning desertion."

"Desertion? You must be simply drunk. What desertion?"

"We know what desertions are," said the messenger, with a sigh; "they run one after another, and there you are."

"But who runs?"

"Embezzlers, they run. It is quite clear. They get into a cab with official money and off they go—and where they go no one knows! Perhaps they go to the cities. For instance, to-day I read such an account, showing that in Moscow alone during the month of October no less than fifteen hundred people disappeared from various offices in that way."

"Yes . . ." said the chief accountant, watch-

ing the smouldering strawberry-leaf cigarette and exhaling the smoke through his nose, ". . . m'yes."

"Can you tell me, Philip Stephanovitch, what will happen if everybody clears off like that in different directions? It will be a very dull service. Take, for example, our own street. How many offices there really are is uncertain, but so far as this corner house is concerned there are five besides ourselves. Take the first floor—two—the head office of 'Uralquartz' and 'Universal Radio Providers'; on the second . . ."

"Why are you telling me all this?"

"For this," said Nikita, ticking off quickly on his fingers. "The whole of the second floor is occupied by 'Electro Machinery,' and so three; on the third floor ourselves and 'Trostreste,' and so five, and on the fourth floor 'Promkusta,' and so six."

"Nikita!" said the chief accountant sharply.

"Now, Philip Stephanovitch, look at 'Uralquartz,' 'Universal Radio Providers,' 'Electro Machinery' and 'Trostreste.' They lost all

their money last week," gasped Nikita, breathless after his hurried statement, "and as for 'Promkusta,' why, they only finished taking things out at daybreak. The last van left at seven a.m."

"Nikita. What are you saying? What?—a van?"

"Oh, that's easy to understand? You can't take eighteen thousand in coppers from the fourth floor to the station in a cab."

"Who on earth keeps such a large amount of ready money in coppers?" asked the chief accountant in surprise. "You are making this up, Nikita; go away."

"I didn't make it up. The Chairman of the Board gave the order, the reason being that official money must be safeguarded. He must have thought that the cashier and, forgive me, the accountant, would never be able to drag the sacks down the staircase from the fourth floor without being accosted. But as it happened, nothing of the sort occurred. As dawn was breaking I suddenly heard a noise on the staircase. I threw on my cape and went

out on the landing. I saw them dragging a sack, but that didn't arouse my suspicions. It could have been anything. Possibly some handmade products which they were taking to the market, or perhaps simply potatoes. I stood for a time and then left the staircase. Ah, my God!—and there, near the entrance the van had already drawn up—and so to the station! And for this reason the staff receives no pay to-day; there is nothing to pay with. We are the only people in the whole corner house with any funds left. . . ."

"You can't be speaking the truth, Nikita. Go," said Philip Stephanovitch angrily. "I haven't time to talk to you. This glass of tea is cold, bring me another one."

"Remember, Philip Stephanovitch," said Nikita quietly, "this is the week in which they pay us our salaries, and no one has any money left. Certainly we in the lowest grade haven't a penny left from last pay-day. . . ."

"Go, Nikita!" the chief accountant interjected in a severe tone, "you interrupt my work with your gossip. Please go!"

Nikita shuffled about where he stood, but the face of the chief accountant did not relax.

"What will happen if everybody disappears?" muttered Nikita, moving sideways out of the cubicle; "it will be a very dull service without pay."

Philip Stephanovitch readjusted his pince-nez, banged open the thick ledger before him, and taking up a ready reckoner commenced his daily task. From time to time, warmed by his labours, he would remove his pince-nez and survey with a superior air, through the glass panels of the partition, the outer office. And it would seem to him that he was nothing more nor less than an experienced general, full of courage and certitude, guiding from a height some very important and complicated operations.

It was obvious that Philip Stephanovitch was not without some imagination, a dangerous quality in one of his mature age.

From the time of the Japanese campaign, which he entered with the rank of lieutenant

and left, going on reserve with the rank of staff-captain, he had spent his days as a finance accountant in different establishments, and in quiet home life, which he had ordered with exemplary moderation and laudable fidelity.

The war of 1914 had not upset our reserve staff-captain very much. Owing to the influence of his wife and the efforts of the business house of Sabakin and Sons, where he was serving at the time, Philip Stephanovitch had obtained exemption. Nor had the revolution which followed more effect on him than upon any other accountant who lived at the time on territory previously included in the Russian Empire. None of them was much affected.

In fact, Philip Stephanovitch was a model citizen. And all this notwithstanding, there was just a little impish adventurous streak in his character. Take, for example, the story of his extraordinary wedding, which is still clearly remembered by old Moscow accountants. If one rummaged in the Roumianzeff

Library one would perhaps find that number of the Moscow *Matrimonial Gazette* for the year 1908 which contains the following announcement:

ANGEL—RE-ECHO YOUR REPLY

SOLDIER, HERO OF PORT ARTHUR,
KNIGHT OF THE ORDERS,

who went into reserve with rank of Staff-Captain, sober and reliable and without physical defects, has decided to remove

THE SWORD OF MARS

for the purpose of devoting himself to the duties of a financial accountant, and to quiet family life.

THE SON OF MARS LOOKS FOR A LIFE COMPANION.

Required: A buxom, fair widow, SECURED BY A SMALL CAPITAL OR A BUSINESS, with a quiet, easy-going disposition, with a view to matrimony.

No reply to anonymous inquirers.

Address serious offers only % Poste Restante, to be handed to the man holding a three-rouble note bearing the number 8563421.

And behold—the buxom widow appeared. She hastened from Lodz to Moscow, and turned the head of the Son of Mars. She im-

mediately arranged his quiet domestic happiness and in a month became his legal wedded wife. It must be admitted that later on it appeared that she had a two-year-old daughter Zoya in Warsaw, whose paternity was unknown, but the magnanimous staff-captain willingly adopted the little one. As for the small capital or business premises, there was none of either, but there was a business. The widow knew perfectly how to make belts, corsets, bodices, etc., and thereby provided the family with a small additional income. In fact, the staff-captain on reserve had no reason to regret the wedding which had been arranged in such an adventurous way, and the head of Sabakin and Sons, old Sabakin himself, once remarked at a boisterous gathering: "Gentlemen, you mustn't scoff at Philip Stephanovitch, who is now assisting our chief accountant." He was a good old man, old Sabakin.

In addition to this little impish streak of adventure there sometimes appeared another streak—a light irony, an unperceivable sense of superiority over those around him and over

things which were happening, a patient and harmless haughtiness. It is quite possible that this streak was born long, long ago, at the time when Philip Stephanovitch, lying on his stomach with the picket between Gao Lian and Chemulpo, read in a novel of high life the following remarkable line:

"Count Guido jumped on his horse . . ."

This novel of high life was forgotten in a year or two, but the burning phrase regarding the count engraved itself for ever in the heart of Philip Stephanovitch, and whatever remarkable thing he might see in the future, whatever brilliant speeches he might hear, whatever overwhelming occurrences might happen around him, Philip Stephanovitch would only twinkle his liverish eye and think, perhaps not even think, but only vaguely feel: "Ah, you, all the same it is far for you all up to Count Guido who jumped on his horse . . . far . . . !" And who knows whether he did not perhaps imagine himself to be that wonderful and unattainable Count Guido.

At about two o'clock, after having signed some accounts and financial orders, Philip Stephanovitch lit the third cigarette that day, went out from his cubicle and proceeded towards the cashier's office.

The cashier's office was built in the same way as his own, except that the partition was of plywood, and the window looked on to the corridor.

Philip Stephanovitch opened the door in the corner slightly, and peering into the office said in a low voice:

"How much cash have you, Ivan, my lad?"

"A thousand and a half, Comrade Prohoroff," answered a low, troubled young voice. "Do we pay the accounts to-day?"

"We ought to pay some of the smaller ones," said the chief accountant, entering the cashier's office.

The cashier, young Ivan, was seated in front of the window at a small table, with the safe behind him. He was putting together a mechanical lighter. Having placed in order on the red blotting-paper various screws, wheels,

flints and springs, he held carefully in his hand a brass cartridge case which he blew into and then held to the light.

A strong spirit lamp was hanging in the middle of the office under a green shade. It lit up his uncut and dishevelled hair, which resembled, as it clustered round a bald patch which was already appearing at the top, the circling waters of a whirlpool, and stuck out over his forehead like a promontory.

Young Ivan was dressed in a dark blue drill jacket, brown breeches and enormous clumsy top-boots reaching to his knees, giving him the appearance of a "Puss in Boots." Around his neck he had a thick cotton muffler. Perhaps it was by reason of his very small stature, his youth, and also for his quietness and politeness, that everybody in the establishment, from the chairman downwards, with the exception, of course, of the messenger and the charwoman, called him, in brotherly fashion—"young Ivan."

Young Ivan looked after his small cashier's office with pride. He loved his large, hand-

some, always well-sharpened pencil, half red, half blue, and to himself had respectfully named it "Alexander Sidorovitch"—"Alexander" the red half and "Sidorovitch" the blue. He loved the strong spirit lamp, the jar of paste, the inkstand, the penholder, and the other penholder which was tied with string at the other side of the cash desk so that it might not be stolen. He liked and respected the strong, pale blue-coloured safe, the wonderful long nickel scissors and the packets of money which were carefully sorted out upon the table.

He desired no greater pleasure than to place a blue tick with "Alexander Sidorovitch" against a person's name on the pay list, to count out methodically the wad of notes, to press it down with a small pile of silver and add coppers to make up the correct amount, and to pass it through the shutter, saying:

"Here you are, you will find that absolutely correct."

When not paying out, young Ivan would close the glass shutter on which was written

"CASA" [1] on the outside in gold lettering, reading from the inside "ASAC," and would occupy himself again with the mechanical lighter. He would take it to pieces, pour into it some petrol from a small bottle, screw it up, try it—producing a red flame—and then blow it out. Then he would draw the wick through his fingers, light it again, then blow it out, singing, "Asac, asac, asac . . ." and then begin to take it to pieces again. This explains why the paper money paid out by young Ivan had a slight smell of petrol.

Thus he did his job, but what happened to young Ivan outside the office, where he lived, what interest he had, what he read or where he took his meals were absolutely unknown.

On the entry of the chief accountant young Ivan rose, and moving towards him greeted him respectfully, stooping so low that he shook hands above his own head.

"Now look here, young Ivan," said Philip Stephanovitch in a low, business-like voice,

[1] Cashier.

which sounded like the rolling of the stomach, "we have to pay out the salaries of the staff to-morrow, and there are also some bills overdue as well as other accounts. We must meet our debts some way or another to-morrow."

"Just so," said young Ivan, quickly.

"Owing to the illness of the clerk who usually pays in, it will be necessary for you to go to the bank to cash the cheque for twelve thousand roubles."

"Y . . e . . s?"

"However, young Ivan . . . you had better get rid of the people first. . . ." Philip Stephanovitch pointed with his moustache in the direction of the corridor, where, through the small shutter, they could see people fidgeting on the straight-backed wooden seat. . . . "Let them go, young Ivan, and look in at my office in an hour's time."

"Right'o."

Young Ivan put his mechanical lighter on one side, opened the shutter, and thrusting his head through, said quietly:

"Comrades, will you please come this way in alphabetical order?"

Philip Stephanovitch in the meantime went to the finance member of the board for his cheque.

The member listened to what Philip Stephanovitch had to say, turned to one side, and with a groan stroked his silky, well-cut beard.

"That's all right," said he, frowning; "but why send only the cashier? You know that at the present time no one knows what is going to happen from one moment to the next, and, speaking frankly, I don't care for your young Ivan. After all, where did he come from?"

Philip Stephanovitch elevated his eyebrows with dignity.

"Where did young Ivan come from? He has already served with us for a year and a half, and he was recommended, as you will remember, by Comrade Tourkestansky himself."

"A year and a half? I'm not so sure, not

so sure . . ." objected the finance member sourly. "Perhaps. Well, understand, he doesn't inspire confidence in me. Look at my position; I am responsible for everything. . . . Do as you like. . . . I entreat you to go to the bank with him . . . personally. . . . As you say, young Ivan is all very well . . . and then all trace of the same young Ivan will disappear. So please be good enough. . . . After what has happened with 'Promkusta' I don't really know what to do. It seems as though one ought to stand by the till with a loaded gun, like a sentry. Then, I tell you, your young Ivan has strange eyes . . . they are such very naïve eyes. I do ask you to go with him."

Exhausted after such a long and uninterrupted speech, the finance member signed the cheque, stamped it, waved it before his face, flushed with excitement, and finally handed it to Philip Stephanovitch without looking at him.

"Please . . . and I ask you . . . earnestly . . . don't let him out of your sight."

In half an hour the tall Philip Stephan-

ovitch with umbrella opened above him and the tiny young Ivan in a military cape, with portifolio under his arm, stepped out in the rain and proceeded down the Meat Market.

CHAPTER II

THE MESSENGER, Nikita, leaned for some time over the banister, hanging over the staircase, eavesdropping.

"They have gone," whispered he at last, with satisfaction, "they have gone; that's all right."

He scratched the back of his head wickedly and spat down the well of the staircase. For sometime there was no sound; Nikita listened intently, and when his expectoration reached the floor and spread as it smacked the pavement with a sound which filled the staircase with the noise of a juicy kiss, he crept hurriedly away from the banister into his cubicle. Here he struggled into a long jacket, greasy at the elbows, stuck his cap on the side of his head and went to look for the charwoman.

The charwoman was sitting in the corridor behind the partition, washing glasses.

"Charwoman, write out quickly a request for your salary."

"Good Lord! are they paying out?"

"Write, I tell you; don't ask questions, or else you will get nothing."

"I don't understand you, Nikita," answered the charwoman, drying her hands in her skirt and turning pale. "Have they gone?"

"They didn't consult us. They have a cheque for twelve thousand roubles with them."

The charwoman threw up her hands.

"Does that mean they won't come back?"

"That's their business. Will you write the note? Otherwise you will miss them, and then it's all over. In Moscow there are, I should say, about ten railway stations: by the time you could run to one they would be off from another. Write, Sergeevna, write, don't keep me waiting."

The charwoman crossed herself, took from a box an inkwell, a small piece of paper, a knotted, sickly-looking pink penholder and looked towards Nikita with a fixed stare.

Nikita perched himself on the edge of the stool, adjusted the elbows of his jacket, and with a laboured sniff flourishingly wrote the note.

"Now sign!"

The charwoman, perspiring with the effort, wrote her signature. Nikita folded the small piece of paper neatly, and carefully placed it in the depths of his jacket.

"I will go to the different banks now," said he. "If I don't find them in the Prombank they are certain to take the money at the Moscow office. What a business!"

With these words Nikita quickly departed.

"See that you don't go into the bar and spend the money on drink," screamed the charwoman weakly after him, and she recommenced washing the glasses.

Nikita ran in the drenching rain up to the Lubiansky Square. It was already dusk. Walls, houses, stalls, squares, newspapers, fountains in the middle—all were grey in the rain. In parts the mud was beginning to glow in the subdued lights of motor-cars. Buses,

snorting heavily, lurched round the corners on passers-by. A stray golosh, circling through the air from the step of a tramcar, splashed in a pool of water. Newspaper boys shrieked: "Speech of Nicolai Nicolaivitch against Soviet authority! Manifesto of Cyril Romanoff! Speech of Comrade Trotsky!"

Splashes and blots of mud were shooting up from all sides. A disgusting chill crept down the back of the neck. It was execrable weather.

Nikita waited patiently for the tramcar, and elbowing his way, squeezed on to the deck. The tram had just recently been repaired, painted all over outside with fresh enamel and ornamented with all sorts of amazing things. There were ultramarine tractors with high spiked wheels, canary-yellow dirigibles, green pictures of country landscapes designed in detail, factory structures brick to brick, and notices. Standards and emblems surrounded golden maxims: "The Land for the Peasants," "Factories for the Workers," "Let the Link between Town

and Country Endure," "The Aerial Red Fleet —our firm defence," and many others. The damp walls of the coach still reeked of oil and turpentine. Altogether it resembled a shooting gallery put on wheels and driven out, to everybody's amazement, from a fair. There were not many such tramcars running in Moscow and it pleased Nikita greatly to travel in them. They brought to him a feeling of delight and patriotic pride.

"Now this is something like," thought he, as he squeezed his way along the platform, "this is a tramcar as it should be—a Soviet tramcar—ours!" And having got into his favourite tramcar Nikita would all at once feel gayer and in higher spirits. "Well," thought he, "I shall soon find them, the tramcar won't let me down."

And, in fact, immediately Nikita entered the vestibule of the bank he saw Philip Stephanovitch and young Ivan. They were sitting on a small bench under a marble column, chatting together.

Nikita carefully, in order not to disturb

them, tiptoed towards them from the side, and listened.

"It is inadvisable to put it in the case, young Ivan," the accountant was saying wisely; "you see, thieves could slash it open. This is what we will do; you put six thousand in various inner pockets and I will do the same, it will be safer."

"So, so," muttered Nikita, trembling with excitement, "so I came in time. They are sharing."

Young Ivan checked the packets of rustling creamy notes and gave half to Philip Stephanovitch. The accountant unfastened his overcoat and was in the act of distributing the money in various pockets when Nikita stepped from behind the column and took off his cap. He drew himself up and lowered his head.

"May I trouble you, Philip Stephanovitch?"

Prohoroff jumped, saw the messenger and frowned.

"What are you doing here, Nikita? Who sent you here?"

Nikita quickly thrust his hand into his jacket pocket and silently handed over the very damp note.

"What is wrong?" asked Philip Stephanovitch, putting on his pince-nez very deliberately and thrusting back his head to read the document.

He read it, then removed his pince-nez and gazed at Nikita with a look of extreme anger and astonishment, shook his head, appeared as though he would speak but could not find the words, and instead uttered a severe growl. Philip Stephanovitch became very red, turned his head aside, again put on his pince-nez, waved his hand before his face, and peering at Nikita handed the paper to young Ivan.

"I ask you to observe, comrade cashier, the point of impudence which messengers have attained nowadays," said he officiously, in a vibrating voice.

Young Ivan read the paper and reproachfully shook his head.

"How can you, Nikita?" said he in a gentle

tone; "is it possible that you can annoy people to such an extent as to follow them to the bank? Everybody will be paid to-morrow: the charwoman will be paid then with pleasure."

"Be so kind as to pay the charwoman and myself to-day," said Nikita, neither moving nor taking his eyes from the packet of notes; "make an exception to the rule."

"What is this new idea?" exclaimed the accountant in tones of the strongest excitement; "for such impudence I will report you to Headquarters. You are absolutely out of order."

"Please, Philip Stephanovitch," said Nikita, quietly but persistently.

"I won't even talk to you—such impudence!" said the accountant, putting the money into his pockets. "Come along, young Ivan."

Philip Stephanovitch and young Ivan moved away quickly as though Nikita were not there, and went into the street, holding their hands over their side pockets.

Nikita rushed a little way in front of them, putting on his cap.

"Give me the money, Philip Stephanovitch."

"I can't understand such impertinence. Rules must be obeyed. What would happen if every employee ran after me in the streets in such a way!"

"They won't all run, Philip Stephanovitch. The higher-paid employees can wait. Give me the money, Comrade Prohoroff, please."

"To-morrow, Nikita, to-morrow. Neither you nor Sergeevna will die before to-morrow!"

"We shan't die."

"Well, then, what is the matter?"

"It's one thing to-day, Philip Stephanovitch, and perhaps quite another to-morrow. Give me the money.

"Tcha, you devil. I will not pay you. After all, do you expect me to take money out here in the middle of the street, in the rain and the darkness, and without the pay-roll? If you

are really in such a hurry, go back to the office, and young Ivan and I will come along in a cab and pay you there. Don't detain us, it is dark already and we are in charge of official money. Go along, Nikita."

The words "cab" and "official money" caused Nikita to jerk his elbows like a bird with clipped wings; the coloured lights of a wireless shop lit up his pale, excited face, he uttered a strange sound from his throat and seized the accountant by the arm.

"Why take a cab, comrades, just because you have official money? What does it matter. . . . And you, comrade cashier, think of our position . . . and as for paying out in the rain, there is a quiet dining-room a couple of steps from here, where you could also have a drink. It would only take two minutes, and after that you could take a cab to the station or where you like, and I will go my way. There are the lights. Come, be decent!"

"Now what can we do with the man, young Ivan? To hand the money over would not

take long, but we haven't the pay-roll, which is the chief thing. No, Nikita, it is quite impossible without the pay-roll."

But Nikita, as if by accident, edged in from the side, pushing Philip Stephanovitch and young Ivan into the side street.

"What does a pay-roll matter?" muttered he. "It's quite simple. Everybody knows the official rating of the sixth grade. It is twelve roubles fifty kopeks for the half-month, without deductions. And according to the note it is the same for the charwoman. The comrade cashier can tick the pay-roll afterwards and the matter is closed."

"It is against the rules," feebly murmured the accountant, trying to avoid the rain which was beating on his umbrella as if on a drum.

"Where are you leading us, messenger? My boots are soaked and it's as dark as blazes," exclaimed young Ivan, stumbling into a deep, dark pool of water.

"Don't worry, we are there now—the next house but one; and you can dry yourself,"

fussed Nikita, avoiding the pools of water. "Follow me, Philip Stephanovitch. To the right. It won't take a minute. Keep more to the right, comrade cashier . . . such wretched weather . . . it is thrice damned . . . Now, please. . . ."

The rain, previously unseen, was now plainly visible, falling like a sheet before the dimly-lit plate-glass window through which scarlet lobsters shone with a dull glow. Nikita pushed open the door, swollen by the steam and rain. It screeched terribly. Their eyes, tired by the rainy darkness, met the welcoming light. "SBARC AND REEB," mechanically murmured young Ivan, reading the sign over the counter from right to left, as was his practice. Philip Stephanovitch closed his umbrella, shook it on the floor and cautiously tapped his side pocket. Two big drops of rain fell from the ends of his moustache.

"Come in, come in," said Nikita meanwhile, fussing round them and urging them into a rather empty room where only two lights were burning; "sit here at this table

under the pine tree. It will seem as though we are in a forest."

Philip Stephanovitch swelled with importance, rubbed the bridge of his nose where the red marks caused by his pince-nez could be seen, weighed up the situation, and found that really one shouldn't have entered licensed premises, but being inside, why not warm oneself and drink a bottle of beer with one's subordinates? In the old days even old Sabakin sometimes went with his shop assistants to the bar of Lvof at the Stretensky Gate to hear the organ and to drink vodka, and what a man he was! As for the office, it was five o'clock—time to leave—so there was not the slightest need to hurry. Deciding thus, Philip Stephanovitch unbuttoned his coat, hung his umbrella and hat on a branch of the pine tree, sprawled in a chair, and tossing on his pince-nez with a superior air, surveyed the bar.

"What can I get for you?" asked the waiter who immediately appeared before them, attired in a grey jacket and long white apron.

Philip Stephanovitch remembered how

adept old Sabakin had been in dealing with similar situations in the bar of Lvof, glanced sideways at Nikita and young Ivan, stretched his goloshed feet and quickly ordered a decanter of vodka, herring with salad, a portion of pork with horseradish and two cups of tea.

"We don't serve vodka, only beer," regretfully sighed the waiter, smiling sadly, with bowed head. "We are not licensed."

"What sort of a bar do you call this, with no vodka?" said Philip Stephanovitch in contempt.

The waiter bowed his head still lower, as if saying: "I myself don't understand how there can be a real bar without vodka for sale, but it's the way of things now, and nothing can be done."

Philip Stephanovitch knew quite well that under existing conditions vodka could not be served in bars, but he could not lose this opportunity of showing off before his subordinates and at the same time slightly patronising the waiter.

"In the circumstances, comrade," said he

in a pompous tone, "give us two bottles of beer, a portion of lobster each, a portion of sausage cut up separately, if it is good, and some well-fried eggs."

"Very good!"

The waiter immediately recognised a genuine customer, respectfully backed away, turned quickly as he went and, like an acrobat, switched on the light. It was immediately much brighter. Young Ivan coughed timidly, looked on Philip Stephanovitch almost with tears of delight, and for the first time in his life suddenly understood what a real man was.

Appreciating the effect which he had produced, Philip Stephanovitch stroked his wet moustache with his handkerchief, smiled benignly, as old Sabakin had done in the old days, lit a cigarette, leaned back and said through his nose, puffing out the smoke with his words:

"Now, comrade messenger, I will hear what you have to say. Proceed."

Nikita rose, stood to attention, stated his case and sat down again.

"Nikita, I am opposed on principle to paying in advance, but it can be done in exceptional circumstances if the amount required is available. Comrade cashier, what ready money have we?"

"We have enough, Philip Stephanovitch, we can pay out."

"If that is so, pay out, but take a receipt."

Young Ivan obligingly took out a new wad of notes, an indelible pencil, a small sheet of paper, uttered an enigmatical expression and immediately the operation was completed in accordance with all accountancy regulations.

Meanwhile Philip Stephanovitch dipped his moustache in the foam of the beer and with a dignified air, puffing tobacco smoke from his nostrils, proceeded to make himself comfortable. Nikita now brightened up, drank two glasses of beer, and flourishing in the air the empty bottles called for two more. The chief accountant allowed it. More people were now to be seen in the bar.

To young Ivan the lights hanging from the ceiling seemed just like shelled eggs. The fact

made him extraordinarily gay, and nearing Philip Stephanovitch he said that it would be as well if he ran to M.S.P.O. for a half-bottle of vodka. Philip Stephanovitch wagged his finger, but young Ivan swore in a whisper that nothing could happen, and that, moreover, everybody did it, and, after all, tomorrow was pay-day. The accountant again wagged his finger, upon which young Ivan disappeared, and soon returned rosy, breathless and wet. Three more bottles of beer had in the meantime appeared on the table.

Under the table Nikita shared out the vodka. The colleagues drank as though they were conspirators, grimaced and took a bite of sausage. The waiter adeptly covered the empty glasses with his napkin, as if to hide a crime, and took them away to the kitchen.

Then Philip Stephanovitch, leaning towards Nikita and young Ivan, breathing out fumes of spirits and lobster, said that in all Russia there never was, is not, and never will be such a man as old Sabakin, head of the firm of Sabakin and Son. Having said this he

lowered his head as if in deep meditation, and knocked an empty bottle over with his arm. "Sorry," said young Ivan, catching the bottle and simultaneously upsetting a full glass. Nikita unfastened the top hook of his jacket, pressed up to Philip Stephanovitch, and thrusting his wet nose into his ear, whispered something rather indistinct but apparently important regarding official money and the station.

"Wait, Nikita. Allow me to have a word," said Philip Stephanovitch, releasing himself from the messenger and falling back upon young Ivan; "wait. . . . I will at once explain everything to you. . . . Young Ivan . . . our life is really nothing but a dream. . . . Let us take for example old Sabakin. . . . You understand, young Ivan? Let us say—Nikita. He sits there quite drunk, planning to spend the pay of the charwoman Sergeevna. . . . That is Nikita and that is Sabakin. . . . Is it clear?"

Philip Stephanovitch winked meaningly and wisely, took young Ivan by the collar,

drew him closer, and smiled so radiantly that the whole bar seemed to revolve round him with golden rays. In brief but unintelligible sentences he explained the difference between the insignificant Nikita and the great Sabakin. He intermingled with this the Japanese campaign, the widow from Lodz, the bar of Lvof, and many other unforgettable details of his life. He breathed his beery breath on the bewitched young Ivan, and above the deafening noise of the now overcrowded bar conjured up before him extraordinary prospects, as though removing a misty cover from things which until then had seemed to the cashier dull and uninteresting.

Suddenly a brisk tune was struck up. The flaxen hair of the pianist fell over the black and white keys of the groaning keyboard. Three hands moved squealing bows over collapsible music-stands. Brazenly inflated lips began to spit into the narrow mouthpiece of a flute, extracting from the black wood a clear, high and tremulous howl. All this combined in a tune which consumed you and filled the

heart with a promise of impossible but easily attainable pleasures.

The egg-like lamps hanging from the ceiling began to multiply with amazing rapidity. Young Ivan was sitting very erect, grinning so broadly that his cheeks seemed to be detached from his face, floating by themselves in the smoky blue haze. Nikita was standing upright with his cap on, saying something quite unintelligible.

"What is that?" shrieked the deafened accountant.

"A happy journey, I say, comrades!" shouted Nikita, steering to the right,—"a happy journey to you, comrade cashier, a happy journey! Let me get another bottle of beer as a final."

"Go on," shrieked young Ivan, understanding nothing.

"Nikita, you are drunk!" said Philip Stephanovitch, wagging his finger,—"I can see that quite plainly."

The waiter very quickly poured out a fresh bottle. The froth crept up the glasses. Young

Ivan fumbled in his pockets and took out money to pay the bill.

"And now, Philip Stephanovitch, you should have a cab," said Nikita respectfully, passing to the accountant his hat and umbrella.

"Let us go, young Ivan," said the accountant thickly, knocking over a chair into the sawdust with the tail of his sodden overcoat.

It was quite clear to young Ivan that to go to one's home just now when life had begun to smile was quite impossible, merely stupid. It was absolutely necessary that by some means such an agreeable and promising evening, having begun, must be continued. After all, to-morrow was pay-day, and once in one's life a little celebration was possible.

"Let us ride, young Ivan," said Philip Stephanovitch, wending his way from the bar into the darkness.

"Where shall we go now, Philip Stephanovitch?" anxiously asked young Ivan, terrified by the thought that perhaps there was nowhere to go and everything would break up.

Philip Stephanovitch opened his umbrella, stopped and put up his hand.

"We are going, young Ivan, to my home. I invite you to dine. You are welcome, so say no more. My wife will be very pleased. You will see my family. Everybody will be extremely pleased. Just a moment, young Ivan. I must tell you that you please me immensely . . . allow me to kiss you . . . and not because I am drunk . . . no, for a long time . . ."

With this, Philip Stephanovitch embraced young Ivan, pricking him most painfully in the eyes with his moustache.

"But perhaps your wife will be displeased, Philip Stephanovitch?" suggested young Ivan.

"If I say everybody will be pleased, it means they will be . . . and pickles. . . . When we get there I will at once say: 'Prepare for us, Yaninochka (this is my wife who is called Yaninochka, and she is from Lodz) . . . prepare for us, Yaninochka, herrings with onions and some pork with horseradish.'

Everything will be as good as it can be. *Soirée intime* in a family circle, as old Sabakin would say. But mind you, young Ivan. I know you young people well. Ah, I can remember myself. Regarding my adopted daughter, look out for yourself. You are certain to succumb to her charms. And after dinner . . . you see . . . coffee . . . with liqueurs . . . cherry brandy . . . be so kind . . ." chattered Philip Stephanovitch, already seated in the cab and supporting tenderly young Ivan, who had turned even more drunk in the open air. Before his eyes was floating a picture of a beautiful oak dining-room, a table covered with a starched tablecloth and laid for six, wooden hares on the sideboard, and such-like things.

Nikita stood for some time in the rain in the middle of the street, capless, gazing after the departing cab. He threw out his arms and with a melancholy sigh murmured to himself:

"They have gone their way. Fate has de-

cided that they shall now travel in other towns, and I must go. . . ."

And then he pulled his cap tightly over his ears and stepped over the pools of rain, muttering:

"With such money—couldn't one travel . . . one could travel over half the world. . . . All the same it would be a very dull service if every cashier and accountant cleared off in this way. I might as well go and get drunk."

And the darkness enveloped Nikita.

CHAPTER III

IN ABOUT half an hour's time, carefully supporting each other, and loaded with carpet bags and parcels, Philip Stephanovitch and young Ivan climbed the staircase to the third floor of a certain house near the Pokrovsky Gate, where Philip Stephanovitch lived. They rang four times. Before the door was opened young Ivan looked at Philip Stephanovitch and said:

"Perhaps it isn't convenient to disturb your wife, Philip Stephanovitch?"

The accountant frowned.

"If I invite anyone to my house to dine, then it is convenient. What is there to say about it? You're welcome. My wife and I will be very pleased . . . *soirée intime* . . . so that's that."

At that moment the door opened and a buxom middle-aged woman appeared on the

doorstep. She was attired in a home-made overall patterned with large roses. By the look on her face, by the peculiar trembling of her hair curled in a multitude of papers, which looked like the tickets of some fabulous lottery (and certainly an unprofitable one), by her attitude which defied comparison, and also by the ill-omened set of her thick thighs, which spoke more eloquently than thunder of the family weather, by all these signs one had no hesitation in concluding that *soirée intime* "in a family circle" would not take place.

But Philip Stephanovitch stood bravely before young Ivan, and advancing with his provisions said:

"I am not alone, Yaninochka—there are two of us, as you see. Our cashier and myself. I have invited him to dinner, as you will gather. You will prepare us some dinner, won't you, dear? I have here something tasty . . . and, of course, some drink . . . ah, ah . . . I ask you to be kind and favour us . . . *soirée* . . . as they say . . . *intime* . . . and

some sweets for the ladies . . . in fact everything to please the family circle."

Talking thus Philip Stephanovitch was gradually losing heart, and slowly trudging his goloshes, approached his wife, who remained, silent and immovable in the doorway, glaring at her husband. The roses of her overall heaved more deeply and slowly. And although Philip Stephanovitch approached her carefully, attempting to conceal his breath, the moment a waft reached her dilated nostrils one hand flew to her bare throat, with the other she raised her overall, and she spat at Philip Stephanovitch, catching him full on the little tuft of beard on his chin.

"Get out, drunken beast!" she screamed hysterically at the top of her voice, so loudly that she could be heard the whole length of the staircase.

Then she turned and banged the door with such a clatter that by the noise one might have thought that every window in the place had fallen out.

"Yaninochka—what is the matter? . . . I

entreat you . . . this isn't fair . . ." weakly and sadly said Philip Stephanovitch, tapping the door with the handle of his umbrella.

But behind the door banged yet another door, behind that another, and behind this yet another, somewhere in the inner depths of the flat, and then everything was silent. A face, swathed in a towel, appeared at the doorway opposite, looked out unconcernedly and disappeared.

"You will remember, Philip Stephanovitch, that I said it might not be convenient," said young Ivan resignedly, staggering about; "perhaps I can come another time?"

"Nonsense! nonsense!" bellowed Philip Stephanovitch; "take no notice, young Ivan. You must understand that she is a terribly nervous woman, but with a heart of gold. Everything will be all right in a minute, believe me."

Philip Stephanovitch wiped his chin with his sleeve, assumed a severe but patient expression and rang four times, clearly and distinctly. There was no answer. Without relax-

ing his dignified expression he repeated the rings, then seated himself by young Ivan on the stairs.

"But what an adopted daughter I have, young Ivan," said he, as if in consolation, putting his arm round the waist of the downcast cashier,—"you are certain to fall in love the moment you see her. She is far above any other beauty. I will introduce you immediately we sit down to dinner. I am not like other rascally fathers . . . I understand that our ideals come with the tune of a waltz."

The remark regarding the waltz appealed to young Ivan very much and he recovered from a slight drowsiness.

"I am not so bad, Philip Stephanovitch, I will not let you down."

Then the door was opened again, this time by a pale, close-cropped, freckled-faced boy of about twelve years of age.

"Ah!" exclaimed Philip Stephanovitch, "this is my son. Allow me to present you, young Ivan, to my son, Nicolai Philipovitch,

Citizen Prohoroff. An inventor and wireless enthusiast. Where is mother?"

The boy turned round and noisily entered the flat, saying not a word.

"Probably she is cooking dinner in the kitchen," said Philip Stephanovitch, sniffing the air, while he pushed young Ivan into the dark entrance hall.

"You will excuse it, but the lamp here is burnt out. Hold on to me. Go straight forward, comrade, and don't be afraid. The road here in the passage is quite clear."

As this was being said young Ivan bumped his forehead on the corner of something which resembled a wardrobe. Philip Stephanovitch groped in the dark and opened a door. They entered a room half full of various articles of furniture. In the centre was a dining-table covered with oilcloth splashed with ink. Across the room were two ropes on which various articles were hanging to dry. A dim light burned under a dusty chandelier. The dabbler in wireless perched on one corner of

the table, pressing to his ear the headpiece of a home-made wireless set and thrusting his tongue out of the side of his mouth as if with the effort.

"Please come in," said the accountant, putting his parcels on the table and making a gesture of welcome. "I hope you will take us as you find us. As regards the underwear drying here—if we put it to dry at the top of the house it would be stolen. But it can soon be cleared away. Sit down. And where is Zoika?"

"At the night school," answered his son, keeping the headpiece to his ear.

"That's a fine thing; neither you nor I have any luck, young Ivan. You see, she is studying shorthand at the classes. She will soon be employed at conferences. A sharp girl! What a business! However, we will soon put things right. Kolka, where is mother?"

The boy silently nodded in the direction of the door.

"Yaninochka—we have a visitor!"

"Get out, you drunken beasts," shrieked the

pitiless voice from the other side of the door.

"Such a nervous woman," whispered Philip Stephanovitch, winking to young Ivan. "You sit down, young Ivan, it's all right. Now unfasten the provisions and open the cognac. I will put everything right immediately."

Philip Stephanovitch took off his hat and tiptoed into the adjoining room. It would not be adequate to say a rose bush, or a bed of flowers—a whole Riviera of storming, terrifying roses descended upon Philip Stephanovitch at that moment.

"Out, out, good-for-nothing drunkard—clear right out of here. I will break every bottle over your head and throw your eatables into the street. There is nothing in the house to eat, rent not paid for three months, Kolka without boots and no lamp in the entrance hall, and you, you wretched old boozer, can arrange drinking parties. How do you manage it? I won't allow you to arrange orgies in my house! What sort of fashion is that? And where is it done? You wretched loafer. Ugh!"

Philip Stephanovitch tried unavailingly to

protect himself with his hands from this torrent of bitter but truthful reproaches. In sheer panic he began muttering incoherently something concerning the cashier, whom one could marry, and that quite simply, to Zoika. That the cashier is not averse to marrying, that the match would be quite suitable, and so on.

At that the wife threw up her hands in indignation, and then dealt Philip Stephanovitch two smacks that resounded on his cheeks as though she had tossed two pancakes in a frying-pan. Stars rose before the eyes of Philip Stephanovitch, stars rose and burned with a glare and went out.

"Ah, you would!" shrieked he in a strangled voice, and suddenly an old wild anger against his wife rose in his throat and began to choke him . . . "ah . . . so you would . . ."

Shutting his eyes to the light he plunged his crooked fingers in the midst of his wife's hair-curlers, tugged them convulsively, and in the merest whisper said:

"Would you, eh?"

His voice vibrated and grew stronger.

"Would you, eh?" he repeated more loudly, sticking out his yellow teeth—"would you, eh?"

With these words he tore slowly, from top to bottom, her overall, covered with those hateful roses. Then through the mist which rose before his enraged eyes he gazed round the room. He quickly took from the wall a Japanese fan, a lacquered bracket, a cage containing a stuffed goldfinch, tore the worsted cover from the dressing-table, caught a blue vase as it fell, put the lot together in a heap in the middle of the room and began to trample them with his feet.

"Hold your tongue! hold your tongue!" he roared in frenzy, deafening himself, and foaming at the mouth,—"hold your tongue! I will show you who is master here. I tell you, I tell you, lay the table, you baggage. I order you, and that's final."

Young Ivan tried to stop his ears with his little fingers so that he might not hear the shrieks and hammering of the disturbance, and in quiet distress uncorked the bottles with

a pocket corkscrew and sadly took from the parcels a ring of sausage. At last the din ended and Philip Stephanovitch, bathed in perspiration, appeared in the doorway of the dining-room.

"I am sorry," said he, panting, and wiping the bridge of his nose with a trembling pocket-handkerchief; "the fact is my wife does not feel well and cannot come to the dining-room. I beg you to excuse her. These ladies' head-aches! Such nonsense! We will sup to-gether."

Philip Stephanovitch went to the sideboard, fumbled in it for a long time, and at last placed two mugs without handles on the table. He rubbed his hands together and glanced side-ways at young Ivan.

"A little drop of cognac?"

They each drank cognac from the mugs, which smelt very strongly of toilet soap. Then they followed it with some sausage.

"The head doesn't ache after a bottle of wine," sang Philip Stephanovitch in a trem-bling voice, pouring out a second helping,

"but it aches for the one who drinks nothing . . . isn't that so, cashier? And no women, so that's that. Your health!"

After the second mug young Ivan's eyes seemed to jump from their sockets, there was a terrible buzzing in his head, and Philip Stephanovitch had already pushed to his ear the headpiece of the wireless set, from which came in a shrill voice: "And you, my love, will be queen of the world for ever."

"Get out, drunken beasts!" came a muffled voice from the bedroom.

"Shut up," unconcernedly muttered Philip Stephanovitch, throwing a piece of sausage at the door. It hit and stuck to the panel of the door.

"Look here, look there,
Does not all please you?"

sang the accountant in a bitter tone, gazing dully at the balancing piece of sausage, then with sobs dropped his head on young Ivan's shoulder.

"You have succeeded in torturing a man, you hussy! You are all that is left to me in

the world, young Ivan. She has driven me to the grave. She has consumed all my youth, may the devil take her! What a man Philip Stephanovitch Prohoroff was—my God, what a man! An eagle! A lion! A count! Would you believe me . . . near Chemulpo . . . with a company of sharp-shooters . . . with a single company . . ."

Philip Stephanovitch gulped down half a mug of Chablis and grasped young Ivan's sleeve.

"Cashier! I can trust you? Cashier, you will not betray me?"

"Rely on me, Phililp Stephanovitch," said young Ivan sadly, and, twisting about as though he could bear the agony no longer, began to weep from a mixture of love, pity and devotion. "Do rely on me, Philip Stephanovitch. In the name of the Almighty, rely on me, I won't betray you."

"You swear?"

"I swear, Philip Stephanovitch."

Philip Stephanovitch lurched as he stood up.

"Let us go."

"What's that about going?" came the hissing voice of the wife as she appeared in the doorway. "Where do you think you are going, you good-for-nothing?"

"Shut up, hussy!" replied Philip Stephanovitch drowsily, and suddenly he tore down from the line a pair of striped drawers and struck his wife across the neck with them.

"Robber, criminal!" yelled the wife, folding her bare arms round the back of her head. "Stop them, they are beating me!"

"Come with me, young Ivan," ordered Philip Stephanovitch, brandishing the drawers. "Don't lose hold of me—come along."

Young Ivan, brandishing the attaché case, fumbled and lurched down the dark passage, following closely behind Philip Stephanovitch, and at last emerged successfully from the staircase. A bare elbow, a few faded roses and the frightened face of the young wireless enthusiast appeared immediately behind in the open doorway. Then the door banged with the boom of a cannon. The steps jumped up, throwing the colleagues from their feet, the

railings came to life with the movement of enraged snakes, twisting and hissing in the wet shrubs, a screaming echo resounded from wall to wall. The swollen street lamp in its iron netting flashed by like a bullet at an incredible height and disappeared. Close by, near the still-ringing door, pressing with her back against the name-plates of the communal residents, and holding tightly a light brown satchel containing an exercise book, stood a young girl in a cheap blue cloak and an orange knitted hat, biting her lip.

"Zoika?" called out Philip Stephanovitch, looking doubtfully into her frightened face, which was surrounded with little fair curls glistening with raindrops—wagging his finger —"Zoika."

"Where are you going in such a state, papa? Without an umbrella and without goloshes," whispered she, with a gesture of astonishment.

"That has nothing to do with you! Shut up! Mind your own business! Follow me, cashier!"

And nearly falling into the street as he gingerly grasped the handle of the door,

young Ivan supported himself by the wall, standing enchanted before the young girl, smiling and speechless. The sweet face with its puckered brow swam before his fixed gaze; he made efforts to arrest it, but it swam, swam, still swam, and then disappeared. A laugh was heard. All this happened in the space of a second. Young Ivan lurched, grasped with both hands the railing and stumbled out into the street almost on top of Philip Stephanovitch.

"To the west end," shrieked the accountant to the driver. "Get in, young Ivan! And Zoika, eh? A sharp girl! Driver, go quickly!"

Young Ivan crept into the narrow cab, resting his head on the shoulder of the accountant, and immediately imagined that they were driving backward. The rain pelted in from the sides on to their trousers and their faces. The multicoloured illuminated posters of the cinema "Enchanted Dreams" swam by. The dark town enveloped them. Lights flickered. Phosphorescent drops fell with a splash from the overhead wires of the tramway.

High up, over the Red Square, over the dimly lit Mausoleum near the walls of the Kremlin, beautifully lit from somewhere, the Red Flag could be seen floating in the dark sky as if made of molten glass.

Then through the glittering Iverskaya Street, through the rattling of cabs and the hooting of motor-cars they reached the Strastnoe. The cab stopped and they alighted. An incredible bustle surrounded them. Burly hawkers, giving no room to pass, brandished before their very noses wet bunches of out-of-season chrysanthemums. Cabmen touted for fares, taxi-drivers shamelessly yelled suggestions to try a ride with the ladies in a "carriage of love." The silver change scattered in a glistening pool of water. A white beam of light from an automobile caught and blinded the eye.

"Where are you, young Ivan?" sounded the muffled voice of the accountant. "Hold on to me."

"I am here."

Young Ivan ran towards the voice and had a momentary glimpse of Philip Stephanovitch. In one hand he held a bunch of flowers. To the other, with a businesslike manner, a stout lady was clinging feverishly. Garbed in an astrachan coat and a white satin hat, she was dragging Philip Stephanovitch through the square, saying quickly:

"Château des Fleurs! I can personally recommend it. There are some private rooms there. Absolutely."

"The happenings of the nights
Promised us delights. . . ."

sang an alluring voice in young Ivan's ear and a soft hand was thrust through his arm.

"Young man, do invite me into the restaurant."

Young Ivan turned and saw a pale face with beautiful eyes. A white knitted hat pulled down over the brow touched his shoulder.

"Come, darling, come, or else you will lose your friend."

"You . . . Zoi . . ka . . ?" asked young Ivan with difficulty. . . . "No . . . wait . . . you must tell me first . . . are . . . you . . . Zoika?"

"You can consider that I am Zoika," answered the girl, commencing to laugh, and pressing herself closely to his arm. They ran quickly across the square, being splashed from all sides.

"Young Ivan, where are you? Hold on to me!"

"I am here, Philip Stephanovitch . . . what darkness!"

Two electric lanterns, two wildly revolving screeching signs over the entrance to the restaurant appeared.

Philip Stephanovitch perceived the girl in the white hat, wagged his finger at young Ivan, and gallantly giving way to his lady, opened with difficulty the door of the Château des Fleurs.

Strangely and inexplicably the form of Nikita appeared before them. . . .

"Count Guido jumped on his horse . . ."

yelled Philip Stephanovitch in ecstasy, in a voice which could be heard throughout the length of the Strastnoe, and, as if in answer to this, the deafening noise of a string orchestra emerged from the doors of the restaurant.

CHAPTER IV

THE following morning Philip Stephanovitch woke up at a certain hour. . . . Each person has his own manner of waking in the morning after a drunken orgy, and as nothing is unknown to a Soviet citizen, so there is nothing strange in the fact that one Soviet citizen wakes up in one way, another so, and a third prefers not to awaken, but lies with face to the wall and eyes closed, waiting in vain for the friends who have forgotten to bring him half a vodka and a cucumber.

More painfully than anyone else, middle-aged accountants who are weighted with family cares and who have a tendency towards liverishness endure the process of awakening after a night of dissipation.

Such a citizen, on waking, usually lies flat on his back with his eyes closed, full of anxiety, and feeling within himself a terrific noise and

rumbling as though he were being taken somewhere on top of a freight train, reckons how much he has drunk and how much he has left, and whether it will be possible to drag on until next pay-day. Then his knees tremble violently, the soles of his feet itch unnaturally, his eyelids flicker, in the centre of his organism, perhaps in his stomach, there is a burning, drawing feeling and a desolate emptiness, and the citizen lies on his back, not daring to open his eyes, tortured by the memory of all the details of yesterday's hoggishness, awaiting the terrible but unavoidable moment when over the couch (for generally, in most cases this sort of awakening does not take place in bed, the proper resting-place)—when over the couch will appear the sharp face of the wife and will be heard the well-known acid voice: "Look at yourself in the glass, you old pig; see what you look like. Open your shameless eyes and look at the state of your coat—all the back is white. I should like to know in what sort of low place you got into that state!"

My God, what a humiliating awakening!

And to think that only yesterday evening "the old pig" had driven through the length of the city in a two-wheeler with a stout lady, with hat tilted back and with a faded bouquet in his hand, with wonderful life on all sides, multicoloured lights and enticements, and caring for no man.

What a rude awakening! On one side—liver; on the other—heart; in front—darkness. Terrible, terrible!

And thus Philip Stephanovitch awakened, and in waking felt all that he had to feel after the ridiculous behaviour of the previous night.

In his ears sounded the rumbling of a train. The soles of his feet itched. His eyelids flickered. And what a thirst! Trying not to open his eyes, he began to remember all the shameful details of the previous evening.

"Now," thought he, "how on earth did it all happen? First of all young Ivan. Why only young Ivan? Again, only young Ivan, where did he come from? But no, first of all a terrible family row."

Philip Stephanovitch suddenly remembered

yesterday's family disturbance in all its details. The faded roses, the flying sausage, the destroyed cage, etc., and he flushed to the roots of his hair. He was covered in a warm sweat. Then he re-established everything else which had happened. "How could it have happened? A most disagreeable story," muttered he, closing his eyes still more firmly.

He remembered the paper flowers on the tables at the Château des Fleurs, the walls decorated with vivid Caucasian views, the tunes of the string orchestra, the garnished herrings, the absolutely drunken young Ivan, and two ladies who demanded port wine and smoked cigarettes. . . . One of them was in an astrachan coat . . . Isabella . . . the other, the lady with young Ivan . . . thin. Yes, but what happened afterwards? Later appeared on the scene some Jews dressed in small Russian shirts and blue pantaloons, and began to dance with such vigour that it seemed they wanted to put their hands and feet through the ceiling. Then young Ivan struck someone in the face with a bunch of withered

grapes. No, this probably happened in some other place. Then Nikita advising them to go to the station. But no, Nikita appeared somewhere earlier, and it was then that he advised . . . however . . . perhaps not . . . then, or later, in a private room with a vulgar picture hung in a black frame under the many-branched antlers of a stag, the waiter in greasy tailcoat opening a bottle of champagne and the cork flying like a butterfly. Then young Ivan, standing in the centre of something very red, blaspheming and vomiting on his boots. Then Philip Stephanovitch douching his head under water running from a tap and the water trickling down his collar. Then encircling Isabella by the waist and rushing at breakneck speed into a cab under some railway bridge, afraid all the while of losing young Ivan and Nikita. Then arriving somewhere at a late hour, a red glowing clock face shining in front. What happened after that, and how had he come home? Philip Stephanovitch had absolutely no recollection, except that perhaps he was brought to his rooms and

put to rest by some sort of conductor, or perhaps it was an Armenian, with a moustache. In fact, Philip Stephanovitch had never been so drunk or acted so immorally during the last ten years.

Having made this sad deduction, the accountant began to reckon approximately, and to remember how much money he had spent from to-morrow's, or better say to-day's, pay. It seemed about fifty roubles, not less. And then there was no knowing how much had been extorted for the champagne. Philip Stephanovitch perspired a second time—this time a cold sweat. He began to listen. There was a strange quietness in the apartment, only in his ears was a roar and quick rumbling, and it seemed as though the couch swayed from side to side. "Either it is very early or very late. However, I overdid it yesterday. Ah, well, what has to be will be!"

He groaned miserably, stretched and opened his eyes, and saw that he lay on the lower bunk of a railway sleeping carriage. It was already quite light. Through the shaking

panes of glass, splashed with raindrops, grey shadows passed quickly. Roaring and rumbling, with spasmodic jerks, the train flew at full speed.

On the opposite seat sat Isabella, her white hat cocked on one side, and on her knees an extraordinarily large lacquer case. She quickly powdered her lilac, potato-shaped nose. Her large flabby cheeks were shaking, like those of a bulldog, keeping time with the motion of the train. In her thick ears dangled pear-shaped imitation pearls.

"What is happening?" exclaimed Philip Stephanovitch hoarsely, as he sat up; "where are we going?"

"Good-morning," answered Isabella. "Happy greetings! We are approaching Leningrad."

Everything went dark before the eyes of the accountant.

"And where is young Ivan?"

"Where should your young Ivan be? On the top bunk above you. We have a quite

separate compartment here. Something like a family bath. Do you see?"

Philip Stephanovitch peered into the top bunk. Young Ivan was lying on his stomach, his head and arms hanging over the side.

"Young Ivan," said Philip Stephanovitch, falteringly, "we are travelling."

The cashier was silent.

"You had better not disturb him," remarked Isabella, thrusting forward her stomach and tying the tapes of her cotton skirt.

She tied them, raised her skirt as a soldier raises his pantaloons, then shook herself, wrapped her astrachan coat around herself, and sat with legs crossed on the seat.

"You had better not disturb him. He is now living through a love drama. His wife slipped away during the night at Klim, left the train as if nothing had happened, such a—forgive the expression—bitch."

"What wife?" exclaimed Philip Stephanovitch.

"Just the same as I am to you," coquettishly

tittered Isabella, digging Philip Stephanovitch with her vanity bag in his yellow neck. "Ah, what men are! They pretend they cannot remember anything."

And she winked meaningly.

Philip Stephanovitch fumbled for his pince-nez, found them, put them on his nose and regarded Isabella's legs. They were thick, short, encased in stained, hard, white cloth boots, sewn at the seams with leather strips and with worn-down heels.

"What are you dreaming about?" gaily asked Isabella, sitting nearer to Philip Stephanovitch.

She tickled him under the nose with the feathers of her hat and raised her skirt temptingly up to her knees.

"Don't be so dreamy! Fie! It doesn't suit you! Take an example from me. Now we will imagine how we shall amuse ourselves in Leningrad."

Philip Stephanovitch understood everything and was terrified. Meanwhile young Ivan stirred in his bunk and groaned.

"Are we travelling, Philip Stephanovitch?" he asked weakly.

"We are travelling, young Ivan."

"I thought perhaps it was a dream. . . ."

Young Ivan descended slowly from the top bunk with his case under his arm, shook his dishevelled hair, smiled vacantly and groaned again.

Isabella quickly rearranged her hat, and drawing still closer to Philip Stephanovitch, said:

"You, young Ivan (you will excuse me, young man, for calling you young Ivan as your friend does), don't worry yourself about that poisonous snake. She is such a—pardon the expression—hag, who can't understand the people she has to deal with. Let her go to blazes. Don't worry yourself on account of her, young man. Be rid of her once and for all. Now if everything goes all right we shall reach Leningrad. Among other things, 'baggage' is cheap. And what is more, I warned you about the girl by pushing you, under the table, with my foot. Your col-

league who bought the tickets could bear me out."

"Who bought the tickets? What colleague?" exclaimed the accountant.

"I don't know who he is. . . . You picked him up near the Château des Fleurs and then he went everywhere with you . . . you appeared to call him Nikita. Looked like a messenger from your office."

"Nikita," groaned Philip Stephanovitch, taking his head in his hands. "You hear, young Ivan? Nikita. Quite right. Now I remember. Just Nikita. That low, unscrupulous messenger who spent the charwoman's pay before my very eyes. He is responsible for all this."

"Ah! ah! Quite right. He also advised going to the station. It was he who assisted you into the compartment. He also was rather tight! Made various speeches in the first-class buffet about journeys from town to town, and about different people's luck . . . he could scarcely stand on his feet . . . and people began meanwhile to gather round. Everybody

laughed. It was funny, you know. I felt ashamed of him."

Hearing all this Philip Stephanovitch took young Ivan by the arm and guided him down the vibrating corridor into the lavatory. Here the colleagues locked themselves in and stood for some time in the small space without looking at each other. The zinc floor with holes in the middle swayed gently up and down under their feet like a springboard. The wind blew up from beneath the lavatory basin.

A decanter of yellow water shook in its wooden case, and in it floated a dead fly, legs upward. There was a smell of fresh oil paint. Through the mirror reflecting the dirty window flew grey shadows.

"Just think, comrade accountant," at last said the pale young Ivan, "that hussy appears to have taken a hundred roubles from my case and alighted during the night at Klim. Please bear witness."

Philip Stephanovitch damped his brow from the lavatory basin and limply dropped his hand to his side.

"What is there to witness? First of all, young Ivan, we must find out how much we have left."

The colleagues seated themselves on the edge of the lavatory basin and began to count. It appeared that altogether there were ten thousand, seven hundred and four roubles and some kopeks.

For a few moments the colleagues were as silent as if they had been struck by lightning. With a buzz like the noise of a grindstone the railway track appeared and disappeared through the hole in the floor.

"So, in addition to our own, we can't account for twelve hundred and ninety-six roubles," said young Ivan at last, and his face dropped.

The accountant cupped his hand and poured into it some of the water, which he drank eagerly, wetting his moustache.

"What will happen?" whispered young Ivan, his stomach feeling as though it were sinking with terror.

He looked mechanically at the mirror, but

saw, instead of a face, a pale, sickly green sight.

"What will happen?"

Philip Stephanovitch drank again, raised his eyebrows and wiped his moustache with a trembling hand.

"Nothing will happen," said he quietly, and was astonished at his own calm.

Young Ivan looked hopefully at his chief, and Philip Stephanovitch suddenly chuckled, and, quite unexpectedly for himself, playfully and mysteriously winked.

"Shall we report?" timorously asked young Ivan.

"Why report? Rubbish! We are travelling, we are travelling, and that's all there is about it."

He winked again, grasped young Ivan by the shoulder and tickled him with his moustache, which still reeked of yesterday's alcohol.

"You have never been to Leningrad before?"

"No, never."

"Neither have I been there. But they say it is a famous town. A European centre. It will be good to look round when you see it. You will be open-mouthed."

"And perhaps by some means or another we can cover the loss?"

Philip Stephanovitch gazed over young Ivan with a look of absolute superiority and condescending irony, and then slyly dug him in the ribs with his elbow.

"And they say that in Leningrad there are such women sitting at the tables in restaurants that you could die. Most of them from the highest society, ex-countesses, ex-princesses . . ."

"Is it possible, Philip Stephanovitch . . . princesses?"

The accountant smacked his lips.

"I tell you, you will be flabbergasted. Such beauties. We will start reconnoitring as soon as we get there."

Young Ivan blushed and tittered.

"And what about this lady in the astrachan coat?"

Philip Stephanovitch pondered again, sucked his top lip and regarded himself solemnly in the mirror.

"What does she matter? We will get rid of her."

From outside for some time there had been an impatient rattling of the handle of the lavatory door.

"Let go, young Ivan. We may be keeping someone waiting. Take your case with you . . . and, above all, don't be downhearted."

They returned to the compartment, young Ivan leading with his case, the severe Philip Stephanovitch following. The attendant had already arranged the bedding and was folding up the top bunk. There was more room and more light in the compartment. On the small table in front of the window lay a paper bag containing apples, a roasted chicken and some bread, and a bottle of vodka rattled. Isabella was standing at the window, fidgeting anxiously and munching an apple.

"Where did you disappear? I got so nervous. Would you believe that I even went

on to the platform? The attendant can tell you so."

And she leaned on Philip Stephanovitch, resting her head on his shoulder. Philip Stephanovitch disengaged his nose from the broken feathers and stepped aside. Isabella showed more signs of nervousness. Such behaviour of a lover boded no good to follow. Alas, she had studied too well the manners of contented men. It became more clear to her that her night-time beauty had hopelessly lost all its fascination and power in the daylight. And that was terribly annoying and unprofitable. No, she simply couldn't allow such a good catch with such decent official money to slip through her fingers. In such a case one must do everything, anything, go all out, only keep him. And she went all out.

Too gaily and too quickly, as if afraid to lose even one precious second, Isabella started to charm. She drew together and then flung open her coat, showing her huge bust. She seated herself on Philip Stephanovitch's knees and playfully called young Ivan "our love

child," and slapped him on the back with her vanity bag. She hastily tore the chicken and tenderly thrust pieces of skin into Philip Stephanovitch's mouth. All the time she chattered unceasingly, sang chansonettes of the Dreyfus affair. Turning in the compartment so that her face completely avoided the light, she crept like a kitten into the darkest corner of the seat and, sitting there, tittered.

Then she ran into the corridor, and in a capricious squeaking voice called the attendant. Several workmen, returning to Leningrad from Volstroya, peered inquisitively from an adjoining compartment and observed her rakish hat and cloth boots. Having made eyes at the workmen, she addressed the attendant who appeared as "dear" and "darling" and asked him to bring a glass.

The attendant brought a mug and she said, "Please eat as much chicken as you wish, don't be afraid of it." Then she half filled the mug with vodka and gave it to Philip Stephanovitch to improve him. Philip Ste-

phanovitch grimaced but drank. Young Ivan also drank. Nor did the attendant refuse, but drank, then coughed, took a morsel of chicken, stood politely in the doorway for a moment, then, having sucked his moustache, went away. Then Isabella took a sip, choked, began to sob and said:

"I cannot stand this vodka. I adore the ladies' drink—port wine No. 11!"

Having had a drink the accountant came to life, his condescending self-assurance and feeling of superiority came back to him. He chose out of the broken box an "Embassy" cigarette, unusually thick and damp, lit it with difficulty, grimaced and then said that 30° strong vodka was neither one thing nor the other, but what could one do, and that in his day old Sabakin drank at the bar of Lvof vodka which took one's breath away.

"And they say that they will soon be selling some at 40°," quickly supported Isabella. "If we are lucky enough to live until then we will drink it together."

And she pressed Philip Stephanovitch's leg meaningly.

"Quite easily," remarked young Ivan.

Then they finished the vodka. Their spirits, which had been spoiled by such a disagreeable awakening, improved. Young Ivan became slightly drunk, and sprawling out his dirty boots began to dream about an imaginary young girl with whom he might be travelling in a cab, cuddling and kissing. Then an orange knitted hat and a nice face with puckered brow floated before him. He made an effort to stop it, but, as before, it swam, swam and suddenly swam past and disappeared. Then young Ivan put his chin on the table and sadly mused, "Some grass has grown on the little paths where the feet of our loved ones passed."

Isabella put her own interpretation on that and condescendingly stroked his head.

"Don't feel lonely, young Ivan. Forget that hussy. When we arrive I will introduce you to one of my Leningrad friends, and she will not

let you be lonely. You can be sure of that."

Philip Stephanovitch blew clouds of smoke through his nose and said:

"We will see what sort of town your Leningrad is. We will reconnoitre."

"You will be delighted. There is the Vladimir Club. You can imagine such real beauties in the cabaret up to five o'clock in the morning. Roulette is played all night long. One of my Leningrad friends, though perhaps not so interesting as the one of whom I was talking to young Ivan, won a hundred and forty roubles in one night, believe me, and the next day this money was snatched from her on the tramcar. . . . And then in Leningrad it is all avenues. Where we have a street, there you find an avenue."

"M'yes, Nevski Prospect, for instance," confirmed Philip Stephanovitch. "To me this is not news. We will see, have a look round, that's certain."

He was already impatient to get there more quickly.

Meanwhile the train was running along a

track as straight as a ruler, approaching Leningrad at full steam. The low, marshy, rain-sodden level ground on which grew bushes or small clumps of trees flashed dully by—the nearer to the track the quicker—and on the horizon, as if stationary, appeared what seemed to be black burned-down stumps. At six-second intervals thin rain-darkened telegraph poles flashed by. Sawn logs of wet birch trees heaped at an angle passed quickly at intermediate stations—ploughed vegetable gardens, fields, and signalmen's huts.

The attendant brought in the tickets and asked payment for the sleeping accommodation. Philip Stephanovitch gave the order and young Ivan paid out. Having received an additional three roubles as a tip, the attendant explained that they would reach Leningrad in ten minutes, and congratulated them on their safe arrival. Philip Stephanovitch examined the tickets thoroughly and handed them to young Ivan.

"Add these vouchers to the file, young Ivan," he said in the business-like, matter-of-

fact tone with which he usually addressed his subordinates in the office, and to his perverted imagination the whole journey seemed to be a service commission with serious State importance.

Summer-houses began to appear through the windows, built of wood in the Swedish style, hedges, railway crossings behind which stood city cabmen, half-demolished brick walls of some sort of building flashed by, rusty tanks, a skeleton of some broken-down water system hanging in the air . . . then a spread of long dull water. This water widened more and more, becoming something like a stream. Behind this, through the rainy mist, a white ground mist, one sight of which gave you a disagreeable cold feeling, approached the dark smoke of a large town. The train began to pass between freight cars and reserve lines. The multicoloured advertisements of various watering-places which were hanging between the windows of the corridors suddenly lost their colours and assumed a half

darkness. The carriage entered the station and stopped. Leningrad porters entered.

"We are here," said Isabella, crossing herself. She seized Philip Stephanovitch under his arm and added in a business-like tone:

"I think, darling, we will go at once to the Hygienic Hotel."

The accountant looked gloomily at young Ivan as though looking for salvation but finding none.

"Shall we go to the Hygienic Hotel, young Ivan—shall we?"

"We can go to the Hygienic Hotel, Philip Stephanovitch."

All three stood fidgeting for a while and then scrambled out of the compartment on to the wet platform.

From the dirty steps of the station the first view of Leningrad opened before them: a large stone square surrounded with immense buildings which looked as though they had been wiped over with a damp sponge. In the centre of the square, his wide, obstinate fore-

head facing the station as if he wished to move it from its position, stood the statue of a big, stout Tsar, bearded like a peasant, seated heavily with lowered reins and legs astride a great horse. On the pedestal in large white lettering were written some lines beginning thus: "Your son and your father are executed by the people." The size of the horse and its rider hid from view a very straight street, the air of which seemed blue in the small rain. Here and there glittered like gold the reflections of already lighted or not yet extinguished fires. Round the square rattled miserable tramcars, plastered all over with labels and advertisements, just like trunks which have been used on a tour of the world. A large unknown town suggested itself behind the square. It tempted and frightened with the novelty of its as yet unknown streets, in some ways suggesting, winking with its greenish little lights, that somewhere there were palaces, bridges and a river, which would be shown to the visitors in time.

Philip Stephanovitch and young Ivan stood

on the top step and inhaled deeply the damp air of Leningrad. They tapped their laden side pockets, gazed at each other and each felt simultaneously a lightness, a fear, and even, perhaps, a strong sense of gaiety.

"Ah, well, come what may, we are here and we will make the most of it."

And some bespectacled foreigners in large, well-cut overcoats, arriving in the International Car with a load of first-class trunks and seating themselves in a hired car, gazed not uninquisitively at the three strange Russians, two men and a woman, without luggage, who clambered into an extraordinary vehicle and were trotted away into the mist of a wide Leningrad street. The cab shook terribly over the broken paving of the Nevski Prospect and Isabella joggled up and down on the thin knees of the accountant and the cashier. Her crumpled rain-soaked hat looked like a gull over the sea.

Young Ivan gave Philip Stephanovitch a quiet nudge with his shoulder and gazed at the back of Isabella as though to say, "Now

what?" Philip Stephanovitch half-closed one eye, assumed a look of terrible sourness and shook his head: "Nothing now, we will get rid of her somehow."

And Isabella, uninterruptedly, continued to bounce on their thin knees and thought, "If only I can reach the Hygienic with you, darlings, once there and you won't be able to get free of me!"

CHAPTER V

"I love you, creation of Peter" (POUSHKIN).

THREE days later Philip Stephanovitch and young Ivan were sitting in their room at the Hygienic Hotel, drowsily sipping port wine No. 11.

"What now?" asked young Ivan in a whisper.

"This is all there is to do," answered Philip Stephanovitch, also in a whisper.

"It's a strange town altogether, Philip Stephanovitch—money galore, everything cheap, yet we can't go anywhere to be amused."

"That all depends upon what you call being amused . . . but it is a bit dull."

"By the way, I am thinking of buying a guitar one of these days. I will buy one and learn to play."

"A guitar?" Philip Stephanovitch dreamily puffed out the smoke, yawned and drummed

with his palm on the top of the glass. "A banjo would have been better—or a mandolin. Italians play serenades on mandolins."

"I could buy a mandolin, Philip Stephanovitch."

And there the talk waned.

Actually things were rather dull. The hopes of a life of splendour were not being realised.

Immediately after their arrival at the hotel, Isabella had disappeared for a time and returned with the friend she had promised for young Ivan. The friend proved to be a skinny, lazy and amazingly tall girl. She was called Mourka. Having entered the room Mourka took off her leather-finished hat, arranged her scanty locks before the mirror and sat, just as she was, in her damp overcoat, on Philip Stephanovitch's knee. "One mustn't be so dull," she said lazily, and laid her pointed chin on his chest; "forget your love and let us begin to amuse ourselves. Give me a present of forty roubles."—"You, Mourka, don't sit on my man," exclaimed Isabella, commencing to laugh, "go to your own bridegroom!" Then

Mourka rose leisurely from the knees of the accountant, said "Forgive me," saw a bug on the wall and killed it on the spot with her finger, then seated herself on young Ivan's knee. "Forget your love," she said, "and let us amuse ourselves. Give me a present of forty roubles. Let's get to business." Young Ivan was embarrassed—promised to give the present. Then they all went to dine at the bar at the Five Corners. During dinner they drank. After dinner they drove to a cinema; the picture didn't please them:—White Army officers were shooting a Communist, soldiers galloping wildly on horses and brandishing sabres, red smoke curling round, another soldier was dragging a machine gun on to a roof, and through it all sat a cocotte, smoking a cigarette and smelling flowers—surely with all their money they could have seen something more interesting! So they took a cab and went to be further entertained at another cinema, but they were disappointed. They didn't look at the posters, and when they entered and took their seats, there on the blue

screen they saw the same soldier dragging a machine gun on to the roof. However, they didn't leave: it was a pity to throw the money away. They saw the picture to the end and then went by cab in search of a restaurant and more amusement. There they saw the same Ukrainians as they had seen in Moscow, dressed in blue pantaloons and dancing the gopak. Imitation flowers tied with paper ribbons stood on the tables, herrings with mouths stuffed with parsley lay in coloured dressings, and the ladies demanded either port wine No. 11, or oranges, or pressed caviare—anything for the sake of spending money—and each took turn to leave the table, demanding two roubles for the dressing-room charge. So they imbibed until closing time and then went, very drunk, to continue the spree at the famous Vladimir Club. In the club were real palms in green tubs, and people were playing roulette. The smoke hung in the room like a haze, and on the stage they were already dancing the gopak. The colleagues and their ladies sat in the main hall, but

young Ivan kept forcing himself on to the stage and wanted to render couplets, so they had to remove themselves to a private room. They had no appetite, but they took pork cutlets, drank port wine, sherry, beer—anything. When their throats began to burn and their eyes to turn red from the effects of the sherry, they moved into the gambling rooms. Is it necessary to describe how they played? You can guess it all! At roulette they had luck, at baccarat—no luck. The ladies were terribly excited, begged money for luck and rushed from one table to another, flushed and petulant, hurrying here and there to make bets. Then no luck at roulette and some at baccarat. This went on until four a.m. Then they came into the company of some pleasant fellows and adjourned with these same fellows to a room in which was a piano. They were entertained by two singers and drank a great deal of vodka. They had only a hazy idea of all that followed. The Ukrainian dancers were paid thirty roubles, excluding supper, the singers fifteen, the cab one rouble, but the

pleasant fellows cost much more, an average of twenty roubles each! And so that the feelings of the ladies might not be hurt they also got ten roubles each.

In the early morning they returned by cab to the hotel. They rose late, drank soda-water and beer and chewed expensive pears without deriving the slightest satisfaction therefrom. Before dinner they locked themselves in the lavatory and counted their money. Then they went off in cabs to dine and repeated the performance of the previous day.

And but for this the colleagues had seen nothing of Leningrad, although the famous town surrounded and almost touched them, winking in the fog with the lights of its unknown streets. They tried all the time to escape from the guardianship of the ladies and to have a good look round the attractions of Leningrad—the ex-countesses and ex-princesses, the Shoumouvoy Orchestra, the "Bar," and many other things of which they had heard quite a lot from the pleasant fellows in the

Vladimir Club, but they couldn't manage it! Isabella had taken Philip Stephanovitch well in hand and, decided upon her line of action, wouldn't let him go anywhere alone. If she left the Hygienic for a short time, then she set Mourka to watch them.

At the moment Isabella was shopping in town. In the adjoining room Mourka lolled on a couch, prodding her ears with a hairpin and peering from time to time through the open door, to see if the men were there all right, talking together. For this reason Philip Stephanovitch and young Ivan chatted together in a whisper.

"But what about having a look round the town?" said young Ivan after a silence.

"It would be good to have a look round," replied Philip Stephanovitch. "Good health!"

The colleagues clinked glasses and took a bite of pear.

"I think, Philip Stephanovitch, that having made up our minds to look round we had better get on with it. Why waste our time with the ladies?"

"Do you think so?" said Philip Stephanovitch, screwing up his eyes.

"Well, what is it to be? Shall we go?"

"Very well, let's go."

The accountant got up and put on his overcoat. At this moment Mourka lazily rose from the couch and called through the door:

"Where are we going? Shall we wait for Isabella, citizen? She will be back at any moment."

Philip Stephanovitch glared superciliously at her.

"You, madam, can remain resting on the couch. This is no business of yours. Let us go, young Ivan!"

"It seems funny to me," said Mourka, offended; "and as for you, young Ivan, I think it is a shameful way to treat a girl."

Young Ivan appeared not to hear and put on his overcoat. Mourka approached him and grasped the attaché case.

"I didn't expect this from you, young Ivan." (The cashier moved silently away from her.) "Why don't you speak?"

Not knowing quite what to do, Mourka made an attempt to sob and faint, but owing to her natural laziness and an absolute lack of temperament didn't succeed. She just managed to fling her hands about and make a strange sound in her throat as Philip Stephanovitch thrust out his yellow teeth and barked:

"Silence!"

He was terrifying. Mourka shrank and snivelled. Philip Stephanovitch hid his yellow teeth and quietly ordered:

"Comrade cashier, compensate the young lady!"

Young Ivan took forty roubles from his pocket, pondered, added an additional twenty and handed them to Mourka.

"Thank you," said Mourka, thrusting the notes down her stocking, and she returned lazily to the couch.

The colleagues were relieved to get out of the hotel, but they had only gone ten yards down the street when they came almost face to face with Isabella, who was driving in a

smart cab. Wearing a pink hat ornamented with feathers, herself surrounded with parcels, she was impatiently urging the cabman by tapping him on the back with a new green umbrella. Down her flabby excited face the lilac powder flowed in the rain. Her earrings beat in time against her face. She seemed to be consumed by a presentiment of ill fortune. She was already blaming herself for having stayed so long in town. It was quite true that she had managed to do all her business—to put 470 roubles in the bank, to buy a hat, an umbrella, boots, a dress length and to order two elegant night dresses—but after all it was unwise to leave the two men alone under the care of Mourka. A man is an unreliable thing, especially if he has money in his pocket. Isabella was terribly anxious: a thick steam rose from the horse.

"A . . . a . . . ah . . . Isabella," weakly exclaimed Philip Stephanovitch, with a hypocritical smile, and he was preparing to meet the gaze of his approaching lady friend, when round the corner came a long van of

the Leningrad Textile Co., splashed with oil, and separated them.

"She won't see us," whispered young Ivan. "My word, she won't see us. Philip Stephanovitch, we shall get past. Hide yourself!"

With these words he dragged the dejected accountant into the nearest passage. And thus Isabella drove past without seeing them. After staying for about five minutes in the passage the colleagues emerged and jumped into a cab.

"Where do you want to go to?"

"Go where you like, comrade—only quickly," shrieked Philip Stephanovitch breathlessly; "five roubles for yourself."

The cabman realised that this was serious business, raised himself in his seat as if in stirrups, looked all round, shook the mare up with his reins and gave such a piercing shriek that the animal galloped for all it was worth and continued until the passengers were out of danger.

It should not be difficult to imagine what happened at the rooms at the Hygienic when

Isabella arrived there and found that the men had disappeared. The scene between the two women was so violent, dramatic and brief, so full of such a number of exclamations, gestures, shrieks, tears, dangerous moments, blasphemies, that to express all this in a few words would be a hopeless task.

Meanwhile the colleagues were driven along wide and rather empty avenues which were covered with rainy mist, and they chatted with the cabman.

"Now, cabby, this is what we want," said Philip Stephanovitch, regaining little by little his usual superiority and severity; "just drive us, cabby, along the main streets. We are strangers here. We have come from the capital on official business, and as we are here we want a look round. Do you understand?"

"I understand," answered the cabman with a sigh, and glancing sideways at his fare he thought to himself, "We know you lookers round: a look round, then off through a passage, and good-bye!" but he answered, "Yes, sir, I understand."

"And so you will drive us round in this manner."

"Oats are very dear nowadays," said the cabman, in a sort of aside.

"Well, you drive us round and show us the chief places of interest, and don't worry about oats, we will treat you well."

"Many thanks; we will do what we can about it. But first of all, what interests you? . . . for instance, your worship, close by is the Vladimir Club . . . shall I take you there? Some gentlemen like that sort of place . . . there, by the way, they have real palms standing."

"No, for heaven's sake, not there, certainly not there. Take us as far as you can from the Vladimir Club. To the Nevski Prospect or where the bridges are, so that we can see the various monuments."

"We can go to the Nevski, but nowadays we call it '25th Oct. Street.' We shall find bridges there and bronze horse statues. And if we go further along 25th Oct. Street we shall come to the shopping centre, and further

still to the Morskaya Street. There, on the right, you will see the offices of the General Staff and the Winter Palace where the Tsars used to live, also the National Gallery. They are all places worth seeing, if that is what you want."

"Well, drive us there—where you like."

"Come along; gee up, my pretty!"

The cabman shook his reins, and before the eyes of the travellers went swimming by, in continuous panorama, the majestic beauties of the old capital.

The Nevski Prospect spread itself out in all its unspeakable wideness and length, with all its unlit street standards, its few passers-by, its shops, company offices, boot-cleaners, hawkers, ending somewhere in the distance with the famous spire. Behind the railings of the Ekaterina Square they caught a glimpse of the serene Empress flogged by the naked branchs of the trees and black with dirt. The dark waters of the river Moika, banked in by the grey granite, grudgingly reflected the arched bridge and the tall houses, all of

similar style with innumerable windows, as if drawn and cut out from cardboard. And the avenue seemed to extend always still further, as though it would never end.

"Here is the Morskaya," said the cabman, turning to the right.

In the narrow crooked street there was silence.

"And there is the arch of the General Staff."

And as he said it there appeared unexpectedly before the colleagues a dark red archway joining together two State buildings.

In front on one side could be seen a large clock erected on pillars. Under the arch, half hidden by the clock, could be seen part of the well-kept pavement.

Having trotted under the dark archway the cabman drove into the Dvorzovaya Square, and before them was disclosed a spectacle of extraordinary beauty and grandeur. Beyond all the small round cobblestones of the square arose a horse-shoe of magnificent buildings. On the other side appeared the Winter Palace,

a brown-red mass drear with rain. On the roof was a multitude of statues. There wasn't a person on the square, and just in the centre towered gracefully, but substantially, the slender Triumphal Column. This was so high that the angel with the cross at the summit seemed to hover on the air in triumph over the expanse of the dead, empty and stone-transformed universe, for which there could only be one possible description: "Empire."

"There's no Vladimir Club here to trouble you, comrade," said Philip Stephanovitch in such a tone as might make one think that all this was the work of his own hands. "What have you to say about all this, cashier?"

"What is there to say? It is a wonderful square, Philip Stephanovitch. Royal!"

The cabman drove across the Square, passed the Tribune, nailed up for the October festivities, passed closely under the side balconies of the Winter Palace and turned on the quay-side. A violent wind was beginning to blow. The yellow water lashed against the supports

of the bridge. The Neva was incredibly swollen and angry.

Driving past the swollen river they went along the deserted quayside, passing beautiful houses and enclosures. Philip Stephanovitch could give attention to nothing else. He was overwhelmed by all that he saw. In his distorted imagination he saw a jumble of pictures which he had never seen in reality—pictures of guard parades, or high social functions, imperial receptions and guards' carousals. Royal carriages came to a halt before the courtyards of imaginary palaces, gauntleted gloves of cavalry guards touched helmets crowned by gilded eagles, shining swords scraped along polished floors, spurs met and separated wth a ring, lackeys carried foaming champagne . . . and Count Guido, having thrust his polished spurred boots in the stirrups of a shining black charger with red dilated nostrils, paused and turned round in the midst of all this, his hat decorated with an ostrich feather, a rose in his bosom!

Meanwhile the cabman had been halted for

some time in the Senate Square before the statue of the Emperor Peter, and young Ivan had mounted the slippery steps at the base, and just reached with his small hand the worn stomach of the rearing horse on whose side he had chalked: "Mourka, you are a fool." His long legs dangling, his rough face turned towards the Neva, his hand pointing to some place in the distance, sat Peter the Great, crowned with laurels. And there in the distance could be imagined, in the deceptive darkness, ships' masts and wharves. And across the wide, turblent water crept the early evening.

Philip Stephanovitch also mounted the pedestal, stood for a while between the hind legs of the horse and thoroughly examined its hard, flowing tail.

Then as the colleagues began to feel hungry, and young Ivan, in addition to hunger, was stifling his eagerness to experience the yet unseen pleasures and to make the acquaintance of ex-princesses, the cabman was ordered to

drive somewhere where they could have dinner and a drink.

The cabman drove them past the dual offices of the Government, and passing round St. Isaac's cathedral returned by another route to the Nevski Prospect. The famous cathedral did not, however, produce the usual impression on the travellers, and Isaac, hidden by the colonnades, with the head of a Moor covered with a triangular gold Byzantine cap, gazed long and reproachfully after them.

And in a short space of time sated and bewildered, the colleagues drove smartly in the fog down the Nevski Prospect, which glittered already with lights, and entered the famous "Bar" which is in the European Hotel. And an hour later the porter of the European, running round the corner for cigarettes, saw a heap of people tumbling from the doors of the "Bar." In the front two people, one tiny, one tall, were running. Behind them, with four excited girls hanging on his arms, was a young man wearing a huge overcoat and smoking a

pipe from which sparks flew in the darkness.

"Gentlemen, take me," "And take me also," shrieked the girls, yelling, and jostling the young man from all sides. And the young man shouted: "Let go, Mourka; leave me alone, Mourka. Loosen me. We are not taking anybody. Let go—go and drown yourself." "But take Lialka, Lialka is a baroness!" "What devil's sort of baroness is she? Don't hang on to me by the coat! Now wait, you wretch!" With these exclamations the three men entered a vehicle which resembled a prison van and banged the door.

The driver started the engine, the vehicle moved off. A hand appeared through the open window and thrust towards the girls an untidy bouquet of chrysanthemums.

"Drive to the Kaminovstrovsky."

The car moved. A head appeared through the window and shouted down the street:

"Make provision for the emperor! Au revoir, dears! Greet our friends!"

And the car departed.

CHAPTER VI

"THIS MEANS the highest society?"

"Certainly."

"No swindling?"

"Absolutely."

"And . . . the emperor?"

"Well, you will see for yourself."

"You see, cashier? Why don't you speak? Ah, comrade, I see you are blind drunk . . . that's what is the matter, that is quite clear."

Then the car, bumping over some very long bridge, came to a standstill. The white lights of the lamps lit up the fence of a large private house.

"We are here," said the young man with the pipe, and he opened the door of the car.

Philip Stephanovitch alighted, stretched his legs and said:

"We shall see now . . . we shall see . . . we shall be able to look round."

"And count . . esses?" asked young Ivan unsteadily, the long row of lights doubling and swimming before his blinking eyes.

"You will see."

"But they will be real ones . . . not imitation?"

The young man rang the bell of the massive door of the house; it was opened, and before the colleagues a grey-haired man-servant in white garters and red livery with gold buttons appeared.

"Friends, friends," said the young man quickly. "Come in, citizens, I beg you. And you, comrade footman, run upstairs and let them know that everything is all right. You can say some gentlemen of the usual sort, from Moscow . . . hurry! I beg you, gentlemen, come in."

The man-servant departed, and the two gentlemen from Moscow, pushed forward by the young man, who made eloquent gestures, entered the hall of the house and stood dumbfounded at such splendour as they had never seen before. Their figures were reflected from

the sides by mirrors, each as large as the floor of a ballroom, and lit by a large number of chandeliers on marble pedestals. A footman took charge of their overcoats, and they felt so uncomfortable that they tittered as though they stood naked in a bathing establishment. At the foot of the staircase, at a small table, sat a young lady in a knitted jacket, selling tickets. Having paid the money, Philip Stephanovitch adjusted his pince-nez on his nose, tugged at his tie and pronounced drunkenly through his nose:

"And now . . ."

"More life! More excitement, gentlemen!" said the young man, with a wink at the young lady selling tickets, and taking young Ivan by the arm—"Follow me, my lords, I will present you immediately at one of the most refined of all the salons which exist in the U.S.S.R. Upstairs and straight along."

With these words he took Philip Stephanovitch in a friendly manner round the waist and hurried him and Ivan up the marble staircase, taking two steps at a time, the re-

flection of his dark blue velvet jacket appearing in the mirror like the shadow of a moving bell. His long cravat fluttered and flew round his thin neck. His striped trousers seemed all movement. His handsome eyes, well set in relation to his nose, slyly but malevolently missed nothing. His sunken cheeks seemed blue by the effect of his dark beard. Sparks shot up from his pipe.

The first room, into which in this manner they ran, was fully lit but empty, except that in the furthest corner glistened an open grand piano, and at the piano sat someone whose form could not be seen, picking out with one finger the notes of some popular song, with long pauses between the notes. In the centre of the next room, reflected on the highly polished floor, posed a subaltern of the Guards, supporting himself on his sword. He tugged his short clipped moustache.

"Where is the society, Poliansky?" asked the young man as he hurried by. The subaltern drew himself up to attention, clicking his spurs.

"The society is in the blue dwawing-woom," said he, bowing and showing his hair parted evenly from forehead to the back of his neck. "George, give me thwee woubles. I have lost evewything at the tables."

The young man merely waved him to one side.

"Go away. What are three roubles when there is a prospect of thousands?"

"You have seen? whispered Philip Stephanovitch. "What have you to say now, cashier?"

But the cashier could not say a word as he was absolutely drunk, and he only smiled uncomprehendingly. Philip Stephanovitch added:

"And even in the train you were asking, Shall we make it up? How could we make it up when there are no available funds?"

With this the accountant felt compelled to mention old Sabakin whose son-in-law had served in the Moscow Grenadiers, but had no time to say anything further, as they had then

reached the entrance to another room—the blue drawing-room.

The man-servant who had just recently announced the arrival of the guests moved to one side to let them pass.

"Ladies and gentlemen," shouted the young man in a voice unlike his own, waving his right hand in the air. "Attention! Allow me to present to you my new friends who have arrived in St. Petersburg from Moscow with the object of meeting high society. Is it your wish that they shall be received?"

The colleagues peered over the velvet shoulder of the young man into the room, and before their eyes everything went absolutely dark. Before them was the highest society, all round the room, in fact, seated elegantly on couches and chairs upholstered in blue silk and with gilded legs; against the costly blue drapings were ladies and gentlemen of the most distinguished appearance—generals wearing epaulettes and innumerable decorations, politicians in uniforms covered with gold braiding, faded countesses with

eagle noses and imbecile eyes, attired in black lace bonnets, admirals, Household Guards, maidens of extraordinary beauty and exquisitely attired . . . some smoking, some talking together, some fanning themselves with fans of ostrich feathers, others seated with legs crossed, their pomaded heads resting on white-gloved hands, gazing languidly before them. On the tables stood decanters, ashtrays and flowers. And in the midst of all this splendour, brilliantly lit by the powerful electric lights, pacing thoughtfully up and down the vivid blue carpet, his arm round the waist of an old man in evening dress, was the late emperor—Nicholas II.

"Is it your wish that they shall be received?" shouted the young man again, and, delighted by the effect that all this had produced on the colleagues, he began to laugh loudly. Then he pushed Philip Stephanovitch and young Ivan forward. Every face in the room turned in their direction and, as it seemed to their drunken eyes, winked in different ways.

"Please do, we beg of you, we beg!" shouted high society, beginning to clap their hands.

The Emperor Nicholas left the bald-headed old gentleman and leisurely approached Philip Stephanovitch, stopped quite near him, put out one leg sideways and, drooping like a sack, tugged slightly at his uniform, smiled graciously, fingered nervously his ruddy moustache and then in a weak voice said somewhat stammeringly, in the manner of the Guards:

"Good-evening, gentlemen. I am very pleased to see you."

"I swear on my honour," at this moment exclaimed an old gentleman in evening dress, with tears in his eyes, and he began to run around the drawing-room, wringing his hands, "I swear on my honour, gentlemen, this is something phenomenal! It is he, it is he! His very image! Absolutely! Every feature! I cannot believe my own eyes! I cannot believe my ears! Again, I implore you, once again!"

"Good-evening, gentlemen . . . very pleased

to see you," repeated the emperor in the same way, and then suddenly in a deep husky bass voice bellowed, his red-rimmed eyes staring eagerly, "Vodka? Beer? Champagne? Or shall we gamble? Ah, ah, ah . . ." and hiccuped sourly. And before the colleagues had time to say a word or even to realize anything coherently, the subaltern appeared before them as though he had sprung from the floor beneath them.

"Honourable sirs, may I present myself? —Grenadier Lieutenant of his Majesty's regiment, Lieutenant Prince Gagarine II. The society demands your generosity and largesse. Will you please order supper?"

Philip Stephanovitch gazed sideways at the subaltern, raised his eyebrows and said at once through his nose:

"Quite pleased. I am Count Guido with his cashier, young Ivan."

Here he made a superior gesture of hospitality and suddenly went purple.

"And quite pleased," shouted he emphatically—"I beg you, gentlemen, *soirée intime*

. . . cherry brandy . . . messieurs and mesdames. . . . I treat you all . . . you are welcome to what I have. . . ."

And at once the lurching Philip Stephanovitch was seized under the arms, on the one side by the subaltern and on the other by the late emperor, and carefully guided into the next room, where they found the buffet. Upstairs on the balcony a string orchestra commenced to play. An old admiral took a pack of cards from his pocket of his tunic. The high society ladies and gentlemen flocked one after the other into the buffet, where the popping of wine corks could already be heard. The young man in the velvet jacket was fluttering about the drawing-room as though he were directing the last figure of a complicated quadrille. The drawing-room emptied, and at last, forgotten in the general upheaval, young Ivan remained alone, standing with difficulty just in the centre of the carpet where the emperor had so recently walked. Dazedly turning his head and grasping his case tightly, young Ivan gazed open-eyed round the drawing-

room, and suddenly saw a young girl, cloaked in a Persian shawl, sitting idly, smoking a cigarette, and looking at him through her half-closed Caucasian eyes as though saying:

"It seems, young man, that you wished to become acquainted with a countess . . . at your service . . . so do risk it. . . ."

Young Ivan experienced a tightening of the throat as he stumbled towards the young lady, bowing clumsily and smiling like a calf, and in a halting voice asked:

"You . . . excuse me . . . are a princess . . . madame?"

"With your permission, a princess and a mademoiselle," answered the lady, puffing a cloud of smoke at young Ivan. "And now, what?"

Meanwhile, having dealt properly with the stupid Mourka, Isabella bit her thick lower lip and hastily considered how she should set about catching the runaways. Another, in her place, might have finished with the whole business, consoling herself with the thought:

Let others get what they can out of these innocents. I am satisfied with what I have had . . . quite satisfied. But Isabella wasn't the sort of woman to be satisfied like that. Her greed was amazing and her plans to enrich herself were immense . . . fifteen hundred roubles, even two thousand roubles, if not three thousand. The very thought that such wealth might get into the hands of someone else reduced her to a state of wild fury.

After bargaining thoroughly with the driver for a quarter of an hour, Isabella flopped into a cab, drawing her cloak around her, and started driving all over Leningrad. First she went to the most likely stations, inquired the times of departure and destinations of the trains, searched in vain for the men in the buffet and the booking office, and calmed herself, as it meant that they had not had time to leave. Then she commenced a detailed round-up of all the restaurants and bars where, according to her wide experience, such runaways could pop in. Such places were not scarce, but she knew them all by heart. First

she looked in the Café Olympia, where in the centre of the floor in a glass case is always to be seen a huge pig with a violet in its mouth. There she showed to her lady friends her new hat, gave them her stockings to feel, tiraded against the stupid Mourka, haughtily gave them to understand that she was now living with the director of a Moscow trust and had fifteen hundred roubles in the bank. Having filled the women there with envy, she pursed her lips, gathered up her cloak and noisily departed. Then she looked in in the same way at the "Niska" and "Vena," the "Château des Fleurs" (for is there not in the smallest town in Russia a "Château des Fleurs"?), the "Gourzouf," the "Danile," the "Continental," and also, as a forlorn hope, the Vladimir Club, and a large number of similar establishments. At last, at about nine o'clock, she reached the "Bar."

"Oh, you are late!" jokingly laughed one of the girls when Isabella, after rushing all round the nine oak compartments of the American Bar, seated herself, breathing

heavily, at a table. "You are late. You don't know what you have missed. You would simply have died. Picture to yourself two gentlemen arriving drunk as owls. At first no one wanted to let them in. Dressed in horrible taste, but what money they had! Just imagine, a huge wad like this, and then more. And they asked, 'Where are all the princesses, and countesses here? We want,' they shouted, 'to spend our time with women of the highest society'—and so drunk were they that they fell from the chairs."

"Where are they now?" asked Isabella, pale, her cheeks trembling. "In what direction did they go?"

"See what a clever girl has found for herself. You have seen frogs jump," interposed another girl, quickly and spitefully holding up a necklace of cat's fur, and snapping her fingers in their faces—"Now catch if you can."

"George took them in a taxi to the Kaminovstrovsky to see the Tsar. You had better go and look for them. They won't be let out until

they are thoroughly plucked, that's certain. There's a whole gang of plunderers gathered round the Tsar."

"What gang? What Tsar?" hissed Isabella, red with rage. "What are you girls trying to tell me?"

"Just look! She knows nothing about it! Have you fallen from the moon or something like that? Such things happen nowadays in Leningrad. You might easily die of astonishment. You know what is all the rage at the cinemas. You can't miss it. Every day they show some sort of historical picture. For instance, just imagine, they began to film some time ago a picture called 'Bloody Nicholas,' in which the Tsar and Tsaritsa figured, with a whole retinue of ministers and politicians. And the chief thing was that those taking part were not regular film artists but the real thing—generals, admirals, adjutants and officers, even an archbishop were taking parts! Cut my throat if I lie! They received three roubles a day, and those on horseback eight. Various tunics, tights, epaulettes and

swords were given out, taken and put on. Such fun. They thought at first that if they put on the uniforms of the old régime they might be grabbed and done in. Eventually, though, they did it. Besides, three roubles are not to be despised. Then they were kept hanging about for three days, photographed in the Square and in the Winter Palace. Such a crowd gathered that you couldn't see a thing. The cavalry had to be called out. Even the Tsar Nicholas whom they had dug up for the purpose was so suitable that many of the old aristocrats fainted when they saw him, so well did he resemble him! And just imagine who it was! Just a mere baker from across the river, a drunkard and swindler whose family name is Sereda. He had a beard and moustache just like those on the old half-rouble. And a leading cinema artist also had come from Moscow to play the part of Bloody Nicholas. He had grown his beard for three months specially for the part. He also resembled Nicholas, they say, but was a little too stout. So of course they were both taken to the Winter Palace, dressed

in uniforms and compared. Old royalist servants—specialists—were called in, shown both and asked, 'Which Tsar is the more suitable?' And what do you think? Once the lackeys saw our baker they didn't even ask to look at the Moscow artist. They said, 'This one, this one. As like as two drops of water. The other is too stout, the nose quite different.' So the Moscovian went off with his beard, back to Moscow. He cursed terribly at the station, they say. He wanted to smack the baker across the face. What a pity you weren't there, Isabella, for two days we nearly died with laughter."

"Yes, but go on, about the gang," exclaimed Isabella, turning impatiently in her chair. "Go on with the story."

"Beyond that everybody knows the story. When these same generals and admirals had put on the uniforms and seen that they were not arrested, but, on the contrary, paid three roubles a day, they were very pleased with the business. Although the filming has been over three days they stick to the clothes, staying

altogether in a studio in the Kaminovstrovsky, refusing to go home. They go about in their uniforms, wearing their swords, drinking vodka, and with them are the baker and some other members of the late aristocracy."

"Yes, but what about the gang?"

"The gang? Very simple! Do you know George? Well, he is an announcer on the stage, quite a well-known bird. It was he who organised this gang. He has arranged a drinking buffet in the house, a pianist, orchestra, dancing, put in a cashier at the entrance, introduced gambling, even roulette. And he takes foreign fools there, showing them the Tsar's Court and charging fifty roubles, in dollars, each. Of course they want to see everything. Of course. And they are shorn like lambs. Yesterday they screwed two hundred gold pieces out of some Germans, and to-day they have got these two. They'll be wrung dry. Before they let them go they will be clean plucked. That's certain."

Without a word Isabella dashed from her seat out of the "Bar." In the doorway a hefty

Swedish sailor with gold-embroidered peaked cap tried to seize hold of her. But Isabella thumped him in his chest with both fists in such a fury that the astonished seaman staggered backwards for quite a distance, trying to regain his balance, and finally landed on the knees of some strangers. And here, before his staring eyes, the bar, the oak walls, the flowers, the notice board, the jugs, the hats, the lobsters, all slowly revolved. Even the tearing noise of the orchestra seemed to topple on one side and over, falling on his head with all its noisy rattling paraphernalia.

But Isabella, having hissed something through her compressed lips about impudent foreigners who take far too many liberties, was already in a cab hastening to find the new gang. It wasn't an easy matter, but within an hour, after having disturbed all the lodge-keepers and caretakers in the Kaminovstrovsky she at last found the private house of the cinema studio. She hurled into it through an unlocked door at the rear, just as the liquor was flowing at its fastest. Inside the house, in

the distance could be heard drunken voices and lively music.

Thrusting through some doorways Isabella hurried towards this noise. In the half-dark corridor she fell over a case of empty bottles —swore horribly. Then she lost her way and found herself in a tiled kitchen where in a thick smoke a red-faced cook was shaking a frying-pan. Then up the oak staircase, definitely lost her way, found herself again in the open corridor and again mounted a staircase, this time a narrow iron one, and at last she found herself on the balcony under the beautifully moulded and decorated ceiling, behind the playing orchestra. Elbowing ferociously through the violins and music-stands, trampling on the feet of the players and puffing out her white cheeks, Isabella thrust her way to the balustrade and then saw below her the drawing-room and the bald pate of Philip Stephanovitch, who at that moment, with a dagger in his mouth, was dancing a Caucasian dance in the middle of the room. Over his jacket he wore the tunic of a general, epau-

lettes jumping up and down like golden claws. Twisting and turning his long legs in a most unbelievable manner, he was waving a beer bottle, groaning and grimacing. It was terrible. And all round him stood noisy people of the highest society—drunkenly applauding and beating time.

"Forgive me, darling, but I see you are here," shouted Isabella, leaning over and shaking her umbrella. "I have searched the whole town for you. My God, what a sight you are! Ah, ah!"

The music stopped.

"Isabella dear," chirped the accountant, and the knife dropped from his teeth and stuck in the carpet. The aristocracy gazed upward in astonishment. The eyes of the young man began to roam like a rat's all round the room. He felt there was a scandal coming and that there would be a lot of disagreeable complications. The late emperor lurched behind the bar with half a chicken in his hand and grasped his moustache and choked. And Isabella had already come into action and was

bellowing down over the heads of the high society, shrieks, vulgar and edged, like half-bricks.

"Swindlers! robbers!" she shouted, turning very red, "there ought to be a law against you; you get into your clutches another woman's man, make him drunk and want to pluck him. Isn't it so? You thieves! I won't stay to look at you, you generals and admirals. I will expose you to the G.P.U. The damnable time of Tsarism is over. And you fiendish countesses, I spit on you all! And as for you, dear, you ought to be ashamed to treat a lady friend of yours in such a way." Here Isabella sobbed and wiped her nose on her fur sleeve. "I never expected this from you, dear, chiefly because I am pregnant and must have at least eighty roubles for an operation. The other women can verify it. If you don't I shall get an order against you, so you can choose one or the other. And you are all witnesses!"

Hearing all this, Philip Stephanovitch, although he was dead drunk, felt such terror and distress that he began to run like a hare

round the room, tumbling blindly over the furniture, unable to find the door. Isabella, appreciating that the battle was nearly won and that now the chief thing was quickness and rush in attack, without stopping to think vaulted over the balustrade, swung her fat legs round the pillar, slid down like a soldier from a greasy pole, and appeared breathless before Philip Stephanovitch.

"Isabella dear, my darling," lisped the accountant senselessly. "Young Ivan, where are you? Friends, cashier, come to me."

"Get ready to come home, dear," hissed Isabella quietly; "get ready, child, before they have completely plucked you here. Let us go home, dear, from this den of iniquity."

In his dazed condition Philip Stephanovitch seemed to see his wife's speckled roses; an animal anger choked him, he was already prepared to show his fangs and roar, but instead, suddenly he seated himself on the carpet and sadly bowed his head.

"Cherry brandy," pronounced he thickly " . . . be so kind . . . madam . . ."

"Let us go, dear," said Isabella, seizing him firmly by the epaulettes; "it's time for bye-bye."

Then the high society at last recovered itself. The young man in the velvet jacket went to the support of the accountant and made threatening gestures in the air, demanding payment for the drinks, the orchestra and the lighting, but he was immediately thrown on his back by a blow from the umbrella—Isabella was not in the mood for jokes. The subaltern went to assist, but somehow got mixed up in his spurs, tumbled over his own sword, knocked over a table loaded with bottles, got terribly confused—fell out. A general scramble started. A white-haired old general in braces who had jumped over the bar in an attempt to prevent his tunic from being torn to pieces, had just time to avoid a blow which landed with all its force on the cheek of the late emperor, who unfortunately chanced to be in the way of Isabella's busy hand. She saw him and her anger reached its highest pitch.

"Ah, you low-down hound! That serves

you right. Rascally emperor! Now you'll know better than to lure away other people's men. I will scratch your eyes out, you bloody tyrant and exploiter of the workers, and give you over to the section. And that's that!"

With these words Isabella thrust her sharp nails into his beard, and hissing with fury tore out a good portion of it. The emperor screamed with pain and suddenly began to cry in a thin nasal voice:

"Com . . . rades. Why did we struggle if an honest non-party member of a union is to have the last hair of his beard torn from him? Because of this same beard during the reign of bloody Nicholas I had to submit to punishments—because of it, curse it, the Tsar's policemen condemned me for imitating his Majesty, and I had even to give a written statement at the police station that I would shave it off. And now, comrades, what do we see when the proletariat is victorious? Am I ever to be saved from my beard? Shall I ever be relieved from it? Though I am not compelled by the authorities to shave—on the

contrary, they pay three roubles a day for the beard—yet from it, the cursed thing, all my misfortunes arise. Believe me, the whole of my life has been ruined by the counter-revolutionary beard—may it wither! Where here is liberty? Where is the inspectorate of workmen looking, and why?"

And for a long time the offended baker held forth in the same style, while Isabella, fending off the attackers with her umbrella, dragged Philip Stephanovitch by his collar along the rooms, full of turbulence, noise and clatter.

And young Ivan, already quite charmed, indeed infatuated by his princess, was sitting in the drawing-room in a corner behind the piano, silently devouring her with his eyes. Though perhaps a little sobered by his passion, he was as shy as before. His jaws were clenched, his forehead was moist and he was endeavouring with all his might to choke the sound of an indecent rolling in his stomach. He burned, tortured himself, didn't know how to commence, grinned in a most stupid way

and was prepared to do anything. And the princess, with hands crossed beneath her shawl and long legs stretched out, showing a most delicate pair of silk stockings and glacé shoes, was holding a cigarette in her slightly moustached mouth, looking through half-opened lids through the smoke at young Ivan with her alluring Caucasian eyes. She just, only just, smiled. It seemed she almost winked. Young Ivan had tortured himself for a full hour in this consuming silence and was quite prepared to commit any sort of improper action, when suddenly the row started in the adjoining room.

Hearing the threatening shrieks of Isabella and the noise of the *mêlée,* young Ivan turned pale and the princess began to fuss; telling young Ivan to sit where he was and not to run away, she went to inquire what was the matter.

It was only necessary for her to look into the next room in order to understand the state of affairs.

On tiptoes she ran back to young Ivan,

edged up to him with her ethereal shoulders, leaned over him, enveloping him in a beguiling perfume, tickling his chin with her hair and, putting her finger to her lips, whispered:

"Ssh! Is the money with you?"

"Yes, I have it," answered young Ivan, also in a whisper, and he went hot and cold inside.

"A lot?"

"A load."

"Let's run."

She grasped him by the elbow.

"Quietly. Don't make a noise with your boots. Be quiet! . . . Ssh. . . ."

And adeptly she led him out on to the staircase.

CHAPTER VII

As soon as they were together in the cab in the middle of the avenue, young Ivan put his arm round the slender waist of the young lady and passionately kissed her neck, then, amazed at his own impertinence, flushed as red as a lobster. The young lady tenderly, but with certain determination, freed herself from his embrace and placed her hand over his mouth.

"Ssh, not now, you have gone crazy."

"When, then?" huskily asked the cashier.

The girl's eyes began to glisten, she wrapped her waterproof overcoat around herself, pressed close to the ardent cashier and began to laugh quietly as though amused.

"Be a good boy. . . . Ssh. . . . 'Give me this night, forget that to-morrow is day,'" sang she in a low voice. "Well? But you can't possibly do things in a cab. What do they call you?"

"Young Ivan."

"And me, Princess Agabekoff, but you can call me just Irene."

With these words she squeezed young Ivan's hand with her cold fingers, pricking him painfully with her sharp nails, and laid her head on his shoulder.

"Where shall we go?" wailed the cashier.

"To the European Hotel," she whispered hotly. "Driver, go to the European Hotel. To-day I am in a mad mood. I want lots of flowers, music and champagne. Ivan, do you like pineapple in champagne? I am very fond of it. . . . With the very thought of claret rubies appear in the eyes, and I will caress you, embrace you, kiss you. . . . Is it not so? . . . terribly *chic?*"

"Pineapple *chic* . . ." stupidly muttered young Ivan, imagining himself in a private room at the European, and was absolutely overwhelmed by the thought.

But no private room was ordered at the European, and young Ivan had to be content to sit very decently opposite the girl in a green

hall which looked like the bottom of the ocean, and he felt out of place and hid his dirty, smelly boots under the table as well as he could. Everything round about was orderly and substantial. Several Germans in stiff collars were eating steamed sturgeon with mushroom sauce, all most business-like. A soldier sat alone in a corner over a bottle of mineral water, his clean, well-cut chin resting on one hand, curling with the other his military moustache as if he wanted to say, "You citizens can do as you like, I am more interested in gipsy romances." Still further away, hidden by the plants on a corner of the platform, was a large company of revellers to whom waiters in white aprons were constantly wheeling service tables laden with hot sizzling roasts under silver covers, bottles of fruit and other things. From this direction could be heard the rush of soda-water from syphons like the noise of fire-extinguishers, and the laugh of a drunken woman. From one empty table to another, treading carefully as though to avoid gouty feet, wandered a middle-aged

gentleman, smoking, and stopping occasionally and sniffing the flowers on the tables, more as if they were mushrooms than flowers.

"And who is that?" asked young Ivan.

"The *maître d'hôtel,*" whispered Irene, making terrible eyes and showing her sharp tongue; "now you understand?"

"Maître d'hôtel, I understand," said young Ivan, and he felt so miserable that he began to feel sober, and asked whether it wouldn't be better to go to the Vladimir Club, where there were private rooms, and so on. Irene said that he must sit still and not keep on worrying, otherwise he would get nothing; that the cabaret would soon start and things would be lively, and after, after the cabaret . . . and she pricked him under the table with her nails. And in fact the cabaret did soon commence. A plush curtain was raised, the accompanist struck up a tune, and from the side of the platform a thin young man in evening dress ran out. Very quickly, seeming for all the world like a horse gnawing at his bit, the young man ran twice round the plat-

form, smiling a crooked smile, and began to talk, rolling his "r's" like roller skates.

"Comrades and citizens, members of the public. Our proletarian republic is now going through a crisis. Although we have State control, the tempo of public life is growing so much stronger that some cashiers from public offices help themselves without any pricks of conscience. . . ." With this the young man made a gesture with his hand which explained everything and was intended to make the people laugh, but the public remained seated with stony faces, and after a little more animated chatter the young man ran away behind the wings.

Young Ivan began to feel disquieting internal feelings on account of these insinuations, and became even more miserable, but Irene sat with a cigarette between her lips, her bare elbows on the table-cloth, resting her chin on the palms of her hands and looking across the flowers at young Ivan like a Medusa, with half-closed eyes which promised much untold pleasure, only one must be a

little patient. Then they began to serve supper and brought foreign wines. The restaurant filled with people. Somehow the orchestra had been playing for a long time already; a lady singer was singing in a deep voice: "We never loved each other, and parted as ships on the sea." The woman, who looked like someone rapidly dealing cards, danced and sang and beat on a tambourine.

Then one of the Germans rose unsteadily from his chair and, gasping with the effort, threw a streamer at Irene. It unrolled in its flight across the room and hung in the air, a long green line, then slowly descended on young Ivan and his lady. The German swelled with pleasure and waved a polite greeting with his hand. Young Ivan became offended, but when he saw that others were throwing streamers at each other, smiled bravely, bought twelve roubles' worth from a girl and began to throw them in all directions with such vigour that he might have been throwing stones at pigeons, and the colours dazzled his eyes. Then he sank back heavily

in his chair, beaming with smiles, passed a hand through his damp hair, called for a bottle, and got so drunk in five minutes that Irene had only to say "ah" and the whole world glowed like a rainbow in his eyes. Not a trace of dullness or worry remained. The glasses and bottles multiplied and disappeared before his eyes. Young Ivan demanded champagne and liqueurs. He drank them without noticing their taste or strength, but saw their colours very clearly: yellow—champagne; green and pink—liqueurs, and still some others; white—also liqueur. Then he ordered a five-rouble cigar from the buffet and wandered here and there for a long time, the burning cigar in his mouth, disturbing the staff, looking somewhere in the noisy corridor for the toilet. In the vestibule sat a girl selling lottery tickets from a glass wheel. Young Ivan bought forty roubles' worth and won a lot of articles which he immediately returned, keeping only for himself a spotted papier-mâché horse, a large brass door-knob and a flask of eau-de-Cologne. Returning to the

room young Ivan saw that the tables had been moved to one side and that everyone was fox-trotting. The same German who had thrown the streamer now had his arm round Irene, shuffling backwards and forwards on the floor, leaning with his great weight upon her and thrusting out his arms awkwardly as she with head pushed back glided with her long straddling legs from place to place, puffing the smoke from her cigarette straight into his fat face. Seeing this, young Ivan's eyes went pink, like a rabbit's, with jealousy, and goodness knows what the cashier would have done had not a stout and very drunken lady from the company which had been drinking behind the platform suddenly grabbed hold of him. Waving the toy horse and the door-knob round the lady, covering himself with thick sweat and burning with fury, young Ivan made a few gliding movements, lost himself and suddenly, cursing everything, commenced to stamp quickly in one place, performing some complicated and strange figures of an obscure Russian dance. "That's right, carry on

in the Russian way," sounded drunken exclamations on all hands. Young Ivan there and then turned round, tore himself from the stout lady and rushed across the room to sit down in a chair at someone else's table. Then the Germans and the company which had been making merry behind the platform put the tables together and joined young Ivan. In an unnatural voice he ordered a dozen of champagne, cognac and lemonade . . . kissed moustached people. . . . For some reason coffee and ice had been standing for a long time on the table . . . somewhere they had already started putting the lights out . . . the stout lady burst the front of her dress and clucked like a hen; she was not feeling well. The streamers were hanging like strips of vermicelli from the extinguished chandeliers and shining cornices. The music had not been playing for a long time. The curtain was lowered. In the darkness a fallen bottle glittered on the carpet. The German, with a face like alabaster, made a bee-line for the door but didn't reach it. The head waiter presented

the bill. And through all this chaos the half-closed misty eyes of the girl looked, played on young Ivan. He grasped her hand. It was limp and warm.

"Pay and we will go," said the girl in a passionate whisper; "don't give him more than a five-rouble tip."

Young Ivan pulled out from his inside pocket a wad of notes, and although he was drunk he quickly and cleverly counted the amount, added the tip, muttered "sign," and pushed the money over to the waiter . . . and for one moment there flashed through his befuddled brain the green lamp of his office; it seemed to him that nothing unusual had happened, that everything was all right, that he was at his employment, sitting at his table and paying out a considerable sum through his little window to the employees. "ABLIMANT," he said, mechanically, and then the green lamp went out. Irene took his arm.

"Let us go," said young Ivan impatiently, running round the girl while the porter assisted her into her coat. "Where shall we go?"

Rain and wind beat on them as they went into the street. The darkness was so intense that they were almost blinded. Young Ivan turned up his collar, seemed to shrivel and become smaller. Near the door stood the same car in which they had come and it looked like a prison van. Young Ivan obediently entered, and it seemed to him that he must have travelled in it at least ten times that day.

"Driver, to the Islands," shouted Irene.

Young Ivan drew his short overcoat over his frozen knees, trembled with cold and put his arms round the unwilling shoulders of the girl.

"Why go to the Islands? Hadn't we better go to sleep at your place?"

"Be quiet. My God; what a sensual beast! You will have plenty of time. No, to-day I am in a mad frame of mind. Driver, to the Elagin Isle! Or I will immediately jump out of the car. . . . Later we can go to my place . . . to sleep . . . you understand?"

With these words the girl leaned away from the cashier with an air of mystery, and nip-

ping his shoulder between her fingers passionately declaimed in a sing-song manner:

"Again two snow-covered pillars,
Elagin's bridge and two lights below;
The whisper of a woman in love—
The rustle of sand, the neigh of a horse!"

"But I think the Hygienic Hotel would be better," pathetically remarked young Ivan.

"Be silent! Not a word! Tcha! . . .

"Over bottomless precipices into eternity
Breathless flies the steed. . . ."

Here the toy horse suddenly jerked from the cushion and flew out of the window. The automobile suddenly jolted and lurched over on to one side. With a curse the chauffeur walked round the car, got down and crawled under the wheels, covered himself with grease, poured horrible curses on everything in the world, and then said that they must get out, as the back wheel was broken and they couldn't go any further.

Young Ivan alighted, searched for the lost

horse for a long time with drunken eyes, and found it at last in a pool of water on the pavement. In the fresh air the drunkenness took a thorough hold upon him, and what happened afterwards to him during that night remained in his mind as merely strange details of a drunken delirium. It seemed they walked a little, then drove in a cab in the rain over a bridge under which flowed noisy and swollen dark waters. Irene leaned against him one moment, then thrust him away, recited strange verses, and all the time he shrieked in his distress to the driver to turn to the Hygienic, but the driver took no notice and didn't answer, and he seemed to be both deaf and dumb. Somewhere in the dark he saw a mosque and talked for a long time with the watchman about Turks. For some reason they didn't reach the Islands. They returned and drove round various streets for an hour and a half until they stopped at a small wooden house. Here at last the girl dismissed the cab and turning to Ivan rudely demanded payment in advance. Under the lamp-post young

Ivan feverishly counted out a large sum of money with trembling hands.

Then the girl began to cry, leaned up to him and kissed him warmly on the cheek, then thrust him away and said: "Ugh, Ivan, how unshaven you are," and led him to sleep in a cubicle where a night-light was burning and where black beetles were crawling up the wall. Behind a cheap curtain in the corner could be heard a snore. "For heaven's sake, quietly," whispered the girl; "my poor mother sleeps here."

"Also a princess, mademoiselle?" asked the cashier in a whisper as he seated himself on the narrow bed and quickly removed his boots.

"A dowager if you like," answered the girl, sniffing the air. "Ivan, you dirty beast, put your boots on again this minute. Your feet smell like a soldier's. Oh, I feel ill!"

"Little Irene darling!"

"Never!" exclaimed the girl. "Don't touch me, you pig. Go and have a bath first."

"What sort of bath can I get now?" pitifully wailed the cashier.

"That doesn't matter to me. Get what sort of bath you like."

With these words the girl jumped on to Ivan's knees, snivelling: "My God, why am I so miserable? Why must I go through all these moral sufferings? Ivan, you are a parvenu and a brute! Go away! Brute! You are trying to take advantage of your position to seduce a noble girl and then leave her. . . . Ivan, you won't ever abandon me? . . ."

"Of course I won't leave you," wailed the cashier plaintively.

"Swear!"

"I swear I won't leave . . . will marry . . ."

"Ivan, you are a real gentleman. . . . I feel so uncomfortable before you . . . you are thinking I don't know what about me. . . . Ivan, I swear to you by all that is holy . . . I swear by my poor mamma who is ill, and my father, an adjutant-general, that I am not a professional. . . . No, Ivan. I need a lot of money. Ah, I cannot sit unmoved and see my poor mamma fading in that damp corner . . .

and money has to be sent abroad to papa. . . . Ivan, you are now my betrothed and I can be straight with you. . . . It is very hard for me, Ivan. . . . Give me a thousand roubles and I am yours."

"Five hundred," wailed young Ivan, grasping with both hands his side pockets, and before his eyes things went dark.

"My dearest, we will trust in Providence . . . a thousand . . . we will find a lodging on the Nevski. We will have such a bedroom . . . bye-bye . . . and miserable little me will be your little wife."

"Eh, what about it?" exclaimed young Ivan, trembling with impatience and handing over the money.

"Merci!" said the princess, took the money behind the curtain, returned and sat demurely by the window. "Indians are like pineapples, and pineapples are like Indians; says the Creole wittily remembering his exotic land," said she, and put out her tongue at him. Then young Ivan became very bold. "Excuse me, don't be so impudent," she hissed, and pushed

her hand forcibly into his wet mouth.

Very near, quite close to his, young Ivan saw her eyes yellow with hate. "Irene dear, baby-doll," muttered he, breathing heavily, "do calm yourself and take away your hand."

The girl broke away. Then they both lost their balance and fell with a bang on the floor. A glass bottle fell from the dressing-table. Then the snoring behind the curtain ceased and a huge sleepy fellow in pants appeared, saying in a gruff undertone, "Citizen, you seem to be going to cause a row," took young Ivan with an iron grasp by the collar, led him out like a kitten and seated him on a dustbin in the street. Then leisurely tying the cord of his pants and shivering in the morning frost, he returned and closed and bolted the door behind him. Next, the toy horse came hurtling at him from an open window and the window closed.

Young Ivan almost began to weep from mortification and anger. Another might have stamped his feet and banged his fists against the door, collected a crowd, broken the win-

dows, tried to call in the police, take out a warrant . . . but could he? The very thought of police covered him in a warm sweat and his knees trembled. Young Ivan picked up his horse and wandered aimlessly down the street. It was already dawn, and the rainy morning light was white, almost blue before young Ivan's inflamed eyes. He wandered for a long time along wide and straight avenues, each looking like the other. Factory sirens were already sounding in the distance. The first tramcar full of workmen rattled past. Workers with tools slung behind their backs appeared round the corners, and one with a saw shrieked at Ivan, "Eh, you mean gentleman, where are you going on foot? You ought to mount your little horse." He didn't know why, but for some reason young Ivan felt suddenly extremely ashamed. He turned into a side street and found himself on the quayside. He went down the deserted bridge over the Neva. Reaching the middle of the bridge he stopped and spat in the water. The taste in his mouth

was both sour and sweet. On the left on a distant foggy bank lay the long fortress, and on the right young Ivan recognized the Winter Palace, the Admiralty, the private palaces and railings—the same which he had seen during the day, but from the other side. Young Ivan looked all around to see if there was anybody about, saw that the whole bridge was deserted, curled his lips in anger and screamed with all his force in the wind:

"Oh . . . emperors . . . to hell with you . . . Tsars . . . bloody aristocrats . . . swindlers . . . thieves . . . twisters . . . drunken brutes and parvenus . . ."

His voice, broken by the strong wind which was battling with the angry waters of the Neva, barely reached the banks, but he went on screaming in the same way in a breaking voice until his throat became quite sore and dry. Then he went through the Palace Square into the Nevski Prospect, along which Soviet employees were already hastening to their service. In a distorting, speckled mirror

young Ivan suddenly saw himself in his short-tailed coat, unshaven, dirty, his green face, his red eyes,—in a word, he saw a parvenu and a beast. He saw and was terrified by his reflection, and for the first time realised that something quite incredible had been happening to him—that all normal people go about with turned-up collars and cases, dash, hurry, are shaved and wear goloshes, and he alone, gazing in the mirror, was like a scarecrow, a filthy pig! Hadn't had a bath, hadn't shaved, hadn't bought goloshes, and feet sweated so much in his boots that they stuck to the soles and stank so much that he was afraid to meet anyone. And such a despair took hold of young Ivan, such a desire to do everything as quickly as possible, to shave, wash, buy an overcoat and goloshes, a cheap guitar, a suitable striped suit, that he rushed immediately to the nearest shop, but found it locked and shuttered. He dashed to another, a third, then to a barber's, all in vain. Every place was like a prison or a zoo—shutters and locks. Then young Ivan felt a terrible tiredness and faintness. With great

difficulty, walking as though his feet were swollen, he trudged to the first cabman, waved his hand, and ordered him to drive to the Hygienic.

CHAPTER VIII

AT ABOUT eleven o'clock that morning a man of remarkable appearance approached the porter's desk at the Hygienic Hotel. At first glance, perhaps, it would have been difficult to say exactly how he was remarkable. He seemed all right, quite spick and span from shoes of a sensible pattern to his heavy, cloth cap, resembling one whose business takes him among racing people, and large wide-sleeved overcoat. He was of upright bearing, short and perhaps almost bull-necked, and rather stout. In all, quite a decent sort of person. But whenever he moved there was a strange accompanying squeak to each of his slightly limping steps, and from his sleeve his left hand protruded unnaturally somewhat in the shape of pincers or a hair-cutting machine. If one looked more closely it could be ob-

served that one arm and one leg were artificial.

Putting on the desk a substantial and well-filled crocodile leather case, the man shook hands with the porter and asked: "Is there anything fresh?"

"Oh, yes," eagerly answered the porter; "the day before yesterday two Moscow embezzlers took No. 16. They were certainly no beauties, but so so, just the average—about four thousand! On each of them, not more! They took a woman with them to the room, went to the Vladimir Club. Everything O.K."

"Just so, I understand," said the newcomer knowingly. And he raised his short eyebrows.

Then without unfastening his overcoat he delved into it and took out a gold cigarette case, from which he offered the porter a thick cream cigarette.

"Do smoke. Very well, just as you like. Now look here, my friend, couldn't you tell me . . ." He fell into a reverie, then came to himself.

"So you say the day before yesterday, in No. 16? Ah ha. So so. So you say from Moscow?"

"Yes, from Moscow."

"Ah ha. That suits me perfectly. Absolutely. Um. With a woman? What else?"

The porter looked around, and as one of the guests appeared on the staircase at that moment he commenced to relate in a whisper all that he knew, and even that he didn't know, about the inhabitants of No. 16. The man with the artificial limbs listened thoughtfully, but at the same time apparently inattentively, to the detailed gossip of the porter, nodding his head from time to time, and interpolating occasionally, "So so, very good" and "Ah ha." And with each "Ah ha" he knowingly raised his eyebrows as if asking a question. Having ascertained from the porter all that he wanted to know he nodded his head, took his case under his arm and leisurely ascended the staircase, his artificial leg creaking as he went, found No. 16, murmured "Ah ha," raised his

eyebrows and knocked twice very loudly and clearly on the door.

In No. 16, meanwhile, from very early morning there had been trouble in the air. The distraught Philip Stephanovitch was brought back by Isabella from the Kaminovstrovsky in a state of unconsciousness, could just get to bed dressed as he was, in overcoat and pinc-nez, but he didn't sleep for long. At dawn he awakened, wild and haggard, covered with feathers from the bed. Isabella didn't go to bed at all, and saved her temper until his awakening, so that they could come to an understanding.

There were many reasons for a row. First, the escape. Second, the ridiculous behaviour in the studio, which cost a lot of money, as it had been necessary to settle up for everything. Third, the disappearance of young Ivan with no inconsiderable sum of money. And many other things. As soon as Philip Stephanovitch opened his swollen eyes and groaned for a drink, Isabella jumped up, took her bag, and

with arms akimbo exclaimed in a high whining voice:

"What does all this mean, dear? Aren't you ashamed to behave in such a way with a woman?"

After this introduction her voice changed, and from the lowest of tones gradually began, preaching and sermonising at the wooden accountant in the very best family tradition.

"You are just the same as others, and for what reason? I have bound myself in misery with you, you drunkard. Where have you been tumbling about, you old pig? your back is all white," and so on.

She lost her temper, was wringing her hands, demanding money to pay for an abortion, stamping her feet, swearing that she would straightway run to the police and lay information; but Philip Stephanovitch sat sideways on the bed, breathing heavily, and in a blind terror gazing through the window, through which he could see a dirty white cat walking along the top of a red roof which glistened in the rain.

At that moment young Ivan entered timidly with the faded horse under his arm, and without looking at either of them began to undress.

"Here, you gentlemen, just look at this. Another good-for-nothing!" shrieked Isabella; "a fine friend—nothing to say. You can shake hands with each other, you are a fine pair. And you, young Ivan, ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourself for the way in which you have treated your friend to-day, dragging him into that hole and leaving him to the mercy of those thieves. Fie! I didn't expect that from you. I should like to know where you spent the night! Judging by the horse I should think it was the European, where you are charged four times the value for everything, and *entrecôte maître d'hôtel* costs three roubles fifty kopeks. I would be interested to know how much you gave the girl!"

Young Ivan silently hung his coat on a nail, tiptoed to the couch, seated himself and let drop his head. Philip Stephanovitch took

out a box and lighted an expensive but unpleasant cigarette, then not without difficulty assumed an expression of dignity and winked at young Ivan: "Perhaps we shall get rid of this woman somehow in time"—but nothing came of this winking. Then Isabella called the floor attendant and sent him to bring port wine and soda-water, and began to sober the men.

Just then they heard knocks at the door, and immediately after that the young man who has already been described entered with the bag under his arm, smiling unpleasantly, and carefully looked round everything in the room in turn—the people and the furniture, gazing round the walls and ceiling with such an air of importance, as though he wanted to rent or even buy it all, uttered several times his all-meaning "Ah ah" and "So so," and at last somehow managed to address Philip Stephanovitch in such an offhand manner as he might have used if he had been talking to the port wine and soda-water on the table:

"Excuse me for interrupting your friendly

chat, but are you not Citizen Prohoroff?"

"I am," answered Philip Stephanovitch, rising unsteadily from the bed and fastening two buttons of his coat.

"Ah ha, I knew that. Very pleased to make your acquaintance; and this citizen, in such case, is probably your friend Klukvin?"

"I am," weakly echoed young Ivan, as if on prison parade.

"Ah ha, so it is you, so so; and this citizeness . . . ?"

"Don't trouble yourself about me, and don't have me in your mind," said Isabella vehemently, going into a fiery blush and hastily donning her feather-trimmed pink hat. "I have a perfect right to drop in on my male friends for five minutes without meddling in their private affairs! I must ask you not to detain me, I have to see my dressmaker."

"Don't get excited, citizeness—everything in good time—I will talk separately with you."

"Not get excited! It seems funny to hear such a thing from a sensible man such as you! I

can restrain myself no longer. What cheek! Let me go!"

Isabella, obviously scared out of her wits, rushed about the room, raising a terrible wind, seized her new umbrella and made a sudden dash for the door, disappearing through it as though she had been blown up.

"A terribly nervous woman, isn't she?" said the visitor to Philip Stephanovitch ingratiatingly, seating himself on a chair. "However, we won't wander from the point. And so I didn't make a mistake. You are Comrade Prohoroff, and you—Comrade Klukvin?"

"Yes," said Philip Stephanovitch and young Ivan together, both turning pale.

"Ah ha, so much the better. Why are you standing, comrades? Be seated and make yourselves comfortable."

They sat down obediently.

"I have just a small official matter with you. I won't detain you."

"I am sorry, comrade," suddenly said Philip Stephanovitch haughtily, through his nose; ". . . sor . . ry. . . . I am a represen-

tative of a central department . . . I mean . . . we are investigators of conditions . . . being in some way . . . in one word . . . but with whom have I the honour . . ."

"I will tell you immediately," said the visitor in a high voice, with venomous politeness, depositing his case on the table. And squeaking with his artificial limbs he opened the case, fumbled in it and drew out a paper.

"Take the trouble to read that, it explains everything."

Philip Stephanovitch unfolded the paper, looked for a long time on the table for his pince-nez, knocked a glass over with his trembling hand and at last stammered:

"May I smoke . . . you permit . . . ?"

"Oh, please, please," exclaimed the visitor, thrusting open his cigarette case. "I beg you, do smoke, Citizen Prohoroff. And you, I believe, Citizen Klukvin, do not smoke at all. I knew that."

With these words he passed to Philip Stephanovitch a lighted match, then blew it out, looked for a long time for an ash-tray, couldn't

find one, so put the match stick back in the box. Philip Stephanovitch took several puffs, inhaled the smoke with great difficulty, and with some fumbling put the pince-nez on his damp, perspiring nose, and then read the paper, on which there was a large seal and several signatures and the following statement:

"CERTIFICATE. This is given to Comrade Kashkadamoff, B.K., to certify that he is travelling agent and distributor of the *Zekompom* editions. All persons and establishments are requested to give him every assistance and support."

"Is it clear—everything in order?" said the representative of *Zekompom,* quickly taking out of the case two post-cards and a brochure in a coloured cover. "I hope we shall soon come to an understanding. Of course it isn't necessary to explain the aims and objects of our establishment. But to business. Here are two complete editions consisting of an artistic

portrait of the well-known composer Monioushka, and a popular brochure in verse on the subject of pig farming, with illustrations—a thousand in each complete set. Two sets, two hundred roubles. Just look at the paper and the printing—first-class workmanship! It is fit to adorn any establishment or private apartment. For example, look at the portrait of Monioushka—an extraordinary likeness—the man to the life. Take it in your hand!"

Philip Stephanovitch took the post-card in his hand and admired it—it really was a living likeness.

"You will have them?"

"What do you think, young Ivan, eh?" asked Philip Stephanovitch in a deep voice, assuming a more natural colour and looking authoritatively at the cashier.

"We can take them, Philip Stephanovitch, why not?" said young Ivan, still unable to think that things were going to turn out so agreeably.

"Very well, give me a receipt for four hundred roubles for two sets."

The representative unscrewed his pen in the twinkling of an eye and wrote out the receipt.

"You will pay now?"

"Pay out, young Ivan," ordered Philip Stephanovitch, "and add the receipt to the file."

"ABLIMANT," said the cashier and paid out, but as he paid he glanced ruefully at the amount remaining and stroked the top of his head.

Then Philip Stephanovitch, stroking his moustache after all the formalities were completed, said:

"And, do you know, I had almost taken you to be quite a different person, you have such an—as you can imagine yourself—official appearance."

"Ah," said the book-agent meaningly, "I understand. I hope you are not disappointed in your purchase? I must apologise for having frightened your lady. Where do you wish the sets to be delivered?"

"Ahem . . . young Ivan . . . what do you think? However, deliver them where you like,

there is no hurry. But you know we aren't really sorry that she has gone."

"Quite, quite," said the agent respectfully. "I understand."

"Perhaps our friend will take some port wine No. 11 with us?" suggested young Ivan, who was hoping that such an extraordinarily agreeable person would not leave without receiving proper hospitality.

"That is a good idea," exclaimed Philip Stephanovitch. "Comrade agent, have a glass of wine?" and he made a gesture of hospitality.

The book-agent did not refuse, but remarked that personally he preferred Château Yquem, Concordia Brand; "much lighter, and the head doesn't ache after it, and it resembles champagne—in a word, a very good wine."

"That is an idea," said Philip Stephanovitch, and, having told how he remembered that at old Sabakin's they had served Château Yquem at table, he sent the floor attendant to bring Château Yquem and light refreshments.

During the wine they talked, and the repre-

sentative of *Zekompom* proved, although he was a swindler, to be also a very pleasant companion and a good story-teller. He told such interesting yarns as could not have been improved upon by a professional raconteur. After a fifth helping, having pushed his cap to the back of his head and rested his broad contented face on the hand of his artificial arm on the table, he said:

"I must say definitely that nicer people than those in the provinces cannot be found. As a rule the provinces are a gold mine—a Klondyke. The capital is mere smoke in camparison. Yes. You can arrive in some ancient vehicle at a chief district town and you feel yourself to be definitely somebody, as, for instance, if you will pardon me, a representative of the R.K.E. To the cabman you will say, 'And tell me, comrade cabman, what sort of district office have you here—one storey or two?' If it is a one-storey, then things are no good, you might as well turn back; but if it is a two-storey—ah ha, that's quite a different thing. 'And tell me, comrade cabman, who

is the district chairman here, what does he look like, how does he breathe, and are there syndicates such as the Kustpromoff in the town?' If the chairman is lean and with a big position it is even worse; but if he is stout and panting—ah ah, it is very pleasant and everything is O.K. If there is also a Kustprom., so so, then it is really wonderful. And so, while the bedraggled horses plough their hoofs through the dirt and lose their horseshoes, while you let a train of wagons bearing some sort of cured skins pass, you get all details at your finger-tips. You drag along up the main street to the district office, your plan of campaign is definitely decided upon. . . . You see it's a wonderful wine . . . your health!"

The representative clinked glasses with the colleagues, sipped some wine and continued:

"It is difficult to deal with a lean chairman. Such an obstinate type! You have to get him at one go, enter his private room without being announced, bang your case on the table: 'One or the other—will you have three sets of the

editions of the *Zekompom* or not? I have no time to waste, comrade, so hurry. On Thursday I have a report to make at the Sovnarkom, comrade!' Now one of two things may happen. Either he will buy at once or he will begin to rage, stamping his feet. If he buys—all is well. But if he begins to stamp his feet, perhaps better say good-bye and retrace your steps. What else is there to say? But with a stout chairman it is much easier, especially in summer or if his private office is well heated. Here business is certain. The stout one you can wear out. You enter, put your case on the table, wink, pierce him with your eyes, remark as a sort of aside that you have come specially on official business and say nothing about yourself. Make the stout one sweat. Let him quake for about an hour and a half. Weaken him absolutely, make him downcast. Then you can twist him any shape. Would you believe it?—after all sorts of forebodings, uncertainties and fears, to find that all one is asking is that he shall buy four sets makes the stout one so delighted that he doesn't know

what to do. He fidgets, runs himself to the cashier's office, puts anything you like on the books the sooner to be rid of you. You can talk of the composer Monioushka as though he were your own father. Very good—lovely —the matter is settled."

He puffed a long stream of smoke up to the ceiling, watched it disperse and smiled affably at the colleagues, as though he wanted to say, "See what fools there are in the world, and I and you (have no fear) are clever."

Philip Stephanovitch and young Ivan felt at once happy and agreeable, and the representative, extinguishing his cigarette on the cork, poured himself some more wine and continued meditatively:

"But of course you sometimes come across a stout one who would rather die than buy any sets. And, on the other hand, once in the Ukraine there came my way a chairman, lean and bony as a dog, and the town, do you know, had a miserable one-storey district office. Outside was tied a goat which was devouring the poster attached to the fence. "So,"

I think, "business won't be good." However, I entered the private room . . . and what do you think . . . a chairman of the Central administrative office . . . from the capital! Quite all right. Asked what was the matter. I gave him all the details and then, 'It's one thing or the other,' said I. 'Do you buy or do you not?' And behold, my chairman suddenly got up from his seat and beamed a most beaming smile, even blushed, the devil, from pleasure, and began to speak in Ukrainian. 'Just what we want,' he screamed—'we have been needing you.' This is wrong, thought I; but if you need us—ah ha—everything is in order. 'They will cost you four hundred roubles for two sets, does that suit you?' 'Four hundred roubles,' exclaimed the chairman, 'where the devil are they to be found? Um.' And he began to ponder. However, thought I, this is going well, very well. 'Bring your balance sheet here,' I said, 'we will soon fix everything up all right.' And what do you think, comrades! My idealist chairman actually brought in the budget for local expendi-

ture. Very well—I opened it—a blank! Not a halfpenny to be made out of it. As for education, you can well understand—it would not be quite right to do the teachers, or to take from the hospital grant. Not quite right, you agree; fire brigade, militia, the same, in fact nothing from which you could drag a bean. And my poor idealist sat there and almost wept, so much did he wish to buy the sets! Upon my word, it was the first time in all my experience. Very sad, very sad. Suddenly—what is this? I read item 10—'For the repair of tools and bridges 351 roubles, 60 kopeks.' Ah, so so. That's what had to be tried. 'Delete, uncle,' I said, '350 roubles from item 10, leaving for the repair of tools 1 rouble 60 kopeks. I will allow you fifty roubles discount, and the bridges can wait. Is that all right?' 'Yes, all right,' said he as an echo, 'the bridges can wait.' And he beamed from ear to ear with delight. I really don't know how they are getting on there without tools and bridges, but what did it matter to me?—I take the money and—au revoir!"

They remained silent for a while—laughed a little.

"Yes, there are no more agreeable people than district chairmen. . . . And what a life in the provinces! What girls! What amusements! No, compared with the provinces the capital is smoke, nothing more. What is a man in the capital if he has a hundred roubles in his pocket, or even a thousand? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Dust, a grain of sand, a mollusc! But in the provinces, with a spare fifty roubles rustling in your case you are rich, a celebrity, a desirable *parti;* a well-esteemed fellow, a person of importance, the devil knows who! everything you could wish for. I am astonished, comrades, that you should be here in this wretched Hygienic with your money, when somewhere in the God-blessed provinces there is perfect happiness. There the local people would carry you shoulder-high. There you would quite certainly be lionised. There the front row in the cinema costs only thirty kopeks, and a three-course

dinner in a restaurant only fifty. And I swear by all that is sacred that you could buy a house with its own grounds for eight hundred roubles, and furthermore get as housekeeper a widow with a thousand and a half tucked away as savings."

Philip Stephanovitch winked at young Ivan and both laughed.

"Your health. Personally the only time I live a full life is in the provinces. I scrape together a little money to bathe for a week or two in provincial pleasures until I have squandered my savings. And I would advise you to do this also. Ah! I can recommend to you a wonderful little town—Urkmutsk—a beautiful river, girls, an important railway club where they perform light opera. In one word, there is nothing left to be desired—eh?"

Here the representative banged his case on the table and rose from his chair, his artificial joints creaking.

"And now, once and for all, do we go or not?" he asked, looking straight at them.

"We go, that's quite simple," shouted young Ivan delightedly, at the same time filling his glass to overflowing.

"Well," remarked Philip Stephanovitch thoughtfully, through the smoke, "I don't object. If one has to reconnoitre one may as well reconnoitre."

"Ah ah, in that case let us go. It is now two o'clock. The train leaves at four. In the meantime there are tickets to get. We can dine at the station. There is sure to be no luggage. Call the attendant."

New horizons opened before the colleagues. They paid the extraordinarily swollen account and felt immediately greatly relieved.

"You say Urkmutsk," shouted young Ivan, walking unsteadily into the street, his case and the horse under his arm. And the word "Urkmutsk," inconvenient and vague, as though purposely invented when in a drunken state by a rogue who has been flogged in childhood with a leather strap, suddenly seemed to young Ivan to have been made out of the sun.

Leningrad was absolutely covered in a thick, suffocating and at the same time cold fog, as though actually no town existed; as though it had only appeared as a vision before drunken eyes, with all its devilish temptations and beauty, for ever to disappear from view. In the near distance the light from lamp-posts faded in a vague fog-distorted rainbow and perished. Unable to see one another, pedestrians only knew of each other's existence by the screeching and splashing of their shoes. Everything was foggy and vague behind the back of the cabman, and from the window of the moving train Philip Stephanovitch only seemed to see Isabella, who was running on the platform after the train, her cloak raised, and shrieking, as she waved her umbrella:

"My dear, my dear, pay me alimony. Where are you going, darling?"

But even this, and everything around them, was foggy and indefinite.

CHAPTER IX

THE TRAIN dragged slowly from station to station, and night dragged as slowly towards the train, creeping through the rattling carriages with their banging doors, with their shadows of heads and flickering flames of candles in rattling lanterns. Young Ivan stood in the corridor of the uncomfortable carriage and, pressing the palm of his hand on the low handle of the door, gazed intently through the rain-splashed window. His knees and his back ached with having stood so long in one place. Hunger was gnawing, but his chief trouble was the impossibility of securing a sleep, as a noisy game of cards was in progress in the compartment. As soon as the train left Leningrad the book-agent had taken a new pack of cards from his case, made a grimace and winked to his neighbours.

Would they like, perhaps, to pass the time

with a little flutter? And some unknown sort of card game was started, at first for small stakes, then higher, and towards night everybody was more or less involved, so that even two railway servants who had been conversing for a long time in low tones on the top berth about eight thousand pounds of wool which had been damped by the rain, came down below, and had already on two occasions, red and perspiring, gone to one side to unfasten their trousers where they too had official money.

Philip Stephanovitch was in great form. His nose went red, the pince-nez kept tumbling from it, the cards and notes were becoming dirty from contact with sweating hands. And the representative had changed entirely and now became as unmerciful and hard in manner as though he were taking everybody by the throat with his artificial arm and saying to each: "Now, comrade, you won't get away; no, you've never met anyone like me." All the people in the carriage flocked round the players; even the guard, who had received a

five-rouble tip, not only didn't put any difficulties in their way, but was even ready to assist in any possible direction—brought beer and candles and informed of the approach of the inspector. Several times young Ivan, in extremely low spirits, sat at the side of Philip Stephanovitch and tugging him by the sleeve whispered, "Enough, Philip Stephanovitch, believe me, you will lose; for God's sake don't trust this man, don't take the fact that he is a representative into account." But Philip Stephanovitch would only wave him away as if to say, "What are you muttering about, bringing me bad luck? Go away."

Young Ivan would go again into the cold corridor, gazing yawningly through the window. The wet and windy night seen from the train was like the border of a sparse forest, glimmer of white birch, shadows of pools of water, or was it falling snow?—one couldn't really understand what was happening at the other side of the window, splashed as it was with large watery snowflakes. Oh for snow! Perhaps it would get colder during the night

and snow would fall, then it would be more gay. Never in his life had young Ivan felt so ill and so dreary, nor had he ever had so much self-commiseration. Thoughts unbelievable and unintelligible passed through his mind. They didn't come consecutively and went away somehow suddenly without taking definite shape, leaving behind them scraps, ideas which were not in order, and a feeling of intense loneliness. Suddenly he would be seized with anger because he had given Mourka sixty roubles for nothing, then he would be angry because he hadn't had a bath, hadn't changed his linen, hadn't bought a guitar. Then there would suddenly come the thought of the unscrupulous princess, the European Hotel, Irene's vile deceit and other things, and they would annoy him to such an extent that he was ready to jump from the moving train. Then suddenly, for no reason whatever, Philip Stephanovitch's daughter Zoika would flash through his memory, the orange-coloured knitted hat, the little curls round the forehead, the knitted brow—she laughing and clutching

to her breast the little satchel with the exercise book—learning shorthand. A sharp girl! He had seen her for one second only, but he could not efface her from his memory. It would have been more quiet, more comfortable to have married such a girl than to be going about in trains. One could have opened a small stall, gone together to theatres and cinemas, and in time perhaps have had a baby, even smaller than young Ivan himself, nose still smaller, no bigger than a pea, sleepy. And in the rattle of the train and of the glass in the window, which young Ivan didn't notice himself, young Ivan sang mentally until his head was splitting with exhaustion, a song which he couldn't forget:

"Some grass has grown on the little paths
Where the feet of our loved ones has passed."

He finished singing, then started again and couldn't stop, and the attempt to get rid of these thoughts made him very queer and dizzy.

And sometimes Philip Stephanovitch ran out with his overcoat unfastened into the

corridor, and rubbing his cheeks with the palm of his hand would say in a whisper:

"You understand, he cuts so that when I have six he has seven; I have seven, he eight; I nine, he ten; it has happened for six consecutive hands. What do you say about that! He has just taken three hundred roubles from the table. The beast!"

And he would return again quickly to the compartment.

Dawn began gradually to break. The snow which had fallen during the night remained unmelted on the frozen ground. White snow-covered roofs and stations appeared. The train stopped. A man in a fleece-lined coat opened the door from outside, peered within and thrust in the corridor a burning lantern. The winter air entering at the same time carried the sound of the clear, shrill whistle of the engine.

"What station is this?" asked young Ivan.

"Kalinoff town," said the man in the fleece-lined coat in a mournful tone, and leaving the door open walked away.

"Kalinoff town," the name seemed familiar to young Ivan. The two words seemed certainly very familiar to him, as if joined together. Kalinoffton. Then immediately there came to his mind an envelope bearing an address, written with an indelible pencil on grey paper: "Kalinoff District, Ouspensky, Upper Berezouka village . . ." and suddenly with a shiver he remembered.

In the doorway appeared Philip Stephanovitch, his astrachan hat tilted on one side of his head.

"Well now," said he in a husky voice, shaking his head, " he is cutting every card in just the same way; just imagine it, he cuts, not like a human being, but like some evil spirit. It is phenomenal."

"Philip Stephanovitch," implored young Ivan, "remember my words. Don't trust him simply because he is a representative. He is a swindler and not a representative at all. His cards are probably marked. He will ruin you, Comrade Prohoroff. Don't go in there again."

"You are talking rubbish, young Ivan,"

muttered Philip Stephanovitch, and he distractedly adjusted the pince-nez which was slipping from his nose. "How can I avoid going back?"

"That's quite simple, Philip Stephanovitch," whispered young Ivan. "Quite simple. Let us leave the train quickly and let him go further with his cards, and good luck to him! We had better stay here in this town Kalinoff, which is two kilometres from the station. It is not a bad sort of town. I was born in the district, and my mother, if she isn't dead, still lives in Upper Berezouka village, which is thirty kilometres from the station. Really, Philip Stephanovitch, it would be better for us to get off here."

"What on earth are you saying?" said Philip Stephanovitch, trembling with cold, rubbing his hands and feeling generally out of sorts. "How can we get down, away from the man? And then, the tickets. . . ."

"What do the tickets matter? Let us get down here, and that's all there is about it. Look, a lot of snow has fallen. We will take a

sledge at once, for fifty kopeks they will have us in Kalinoff in a jiffy—straight to the hotel. Let us alight, Philip Stephanovitch."

"All right," said Philip Stephanovitch. "Kalinoff, then, and get rid of your anxiety. Let us go into the first-class buffet and treat ourselves to some vodka."

They stepped down carefully on to the line, walked in the snow in the darkness beneath the lighted carriage windows, on to the platform where several indistinct figures could be seen seated on sacks near the waiting-room. A drowsy bell signalled departure, the engine puffed out steam and the train departed, taking away much illumination from the station.

But in the miserable buffet, where for some reason an oil lamp instead of electric light burned, they found neither vodka nor beer, and the attendant, who was carrying lemonade from seat to seat, said in an angry voice that because of recruiting the sale of any sort of alcoholic drink had been forbidden for three days within a radius of a hundred kilometres, and the only drink of that sort that you could

get was home-brewed. "Come to-morrow, there will be plenty of the 40° sort."

"This is a fine thing," said Philip Stephanovitch. "A very good place, your town Kalinoff. What do you say about it?"

There was nothing else to do in the station. Philip Stephanovitch and young Ivan went out to the entrance.

Four cab-drivers, numbered like a calendar, were waiting on the other side of the road, near the station garden. Two had vehicles with wheels; two had sledges. One could see that the weather here was neither one thing nor the other. The drivers were sitting dejectedly on their driving seats, their legs dangling over one side. They paid no attention to the visitors. The horses, with noses thrust in nosebags, stood in a drooping attitude, not even moving their tails. The two colleagues had been standing in the entrance for about two minutes, shivering from the early morning chill, before one of the drivers at last asked with a yawn, with his hand across his bearded mouth:

"Has the train arrived, then?"

"It has arrived," said young Ivan. "Fifty kopeks to take us to the town Kalinoff?"

"Give me forty kopeks, the road is not difficult," said the driver quickly, removing his torn hat.

"Strange man!" said Philip Stephanovitch; "one offers you fifty kopeks and you ask forty. What is it? have you a fixed charge here?"

"Why a fixed charge?" said the driver in an offended tone, putting on his hat. "Let others drive you for a fixed charge. I only misunderstood, thought you said twenty-five kopeks instead of fifty."

"Very well, drive us for forty kopeks if that is the case."

The driver again removed his hat, pressed it in his hands several times, considered a little, then resolutely pulled it down to his very ears.

"Others can drive you for forty kopeks, but I won't drive you for less than twenty-five," said he quickly.

"What sort of obstinate fellow are you?" said Philip Stephanovitch angrily. "We haven't time to talk to you here, we have some

business to attend to, we have to reconnoitre. One moment he is offered fifty kopeks, the next he won't go for less than twenty-five!"

"Let others drive you for twenty-five kopeks. I have already agreed that I won't take you for less than fifty."

"What is it? are you making fools of us or are you drunk?" shrieked Philip Stephanovitch, absolutely losing his temper. "One moment twenty-five, the next fifty; you don't know what you do want, you drunkard!"

"Speaking of drunkenness, to-morrow, when they let the 40° be sold, perhaps yes, but now—quite sober. I say twenty-five but think about fifty," said the driver, taking off his hat again; "they are very similar in pronunciation, twenty-five and fifty."

"Well, what is it? are you driving us for forty kopeks or are you not?" roared Philip Stephanovitch in a choking voice which echoed throughout the square.

"I will not take you," answered the driver indifferently, turning his back on them; "let others take you."

"Poof!" said Philip Stephanovitch, and actually spat with fury.

Then a young driver in a white Siberian fur cap and a sheepskin jacket, through tears in the armpits of which the lining could be seen, said jauntily:

"Come this way. I will take you for thirty kopeks," and he beckoned with his hand.

The colleagues crept into a queer, narrow sledge, which was strewn inside with straw, put the cover over their knees and drove to the town, which had the same appearance as all other towns of the Soviet Union—ten old churches and two new ones, an unfinished building and a fire station, and a closed market-place secured by huge bolts. In the middle of the market-place stood a freckled peasant with a cow which he had brought from heaven knows where to sell. Having heard during the journey from his fares that they were Soviet employees, and that they had come to Kalinoff to investigate, the cabby raised himself in his driving seat and shouted "Gee up" to his grey, mousy-looking horse,

and with an air drove up to the Peasants' hostel, the long balcony entrance of which faced the market square. However, the hostel was not yet open, and on its step were seated several dull peasants who paid not the slightest attention to the colleagues. Adjoining the house was a bar—the "Eagle"—which had also rooms, and still a little further along was a tea-room, also closed.

Philip Stephanovitch and young Ivan alighted from the sledge, and having paid the driver went to walk round the market square. The driver hung the nosebag over the horse's head, shook his whip admonishingly, and followed the colleagues so that if necesary he could be of service to them.

While the cabman was on his driving seat he seemed more or less all right, but as soon as he descended and began to walk, all his poverty and weakness were evident; his sheepskin jacket was all cobbled, patch upon patch, the sides slit to the pockets, odd boots, which wobbled on his narrow feet and prevented his walking properly, his nose pointed

and red, stunted beard like a clump of bushes, small blue vicious eyes—it was easy to see that the man was no fool, but quite a sharp fellow, not averse to taking a drink, altogether the sort of man who on being called up for military service would be classified as non-combatant and put in an auxiliary corps. The colleagues went round the square with a lonely air. On the corner house was a red tablet with the notice, "Deceased-comrade Dedoushkin Square"; a little further on, at the commencement of a deserted street, could be seen another tablet "Deceased Dedoushkin Street." Also on a long board over the entrance to a locked shop was painted in large letters: "Deceased-comrade Dedoushkin, Co-operative Stores." Here the driver said that he was at their service and explained what it all meant; how there had been in the town of Kalinoff a chief of police, one Comrade Dedoushkin, something greater than a mere man! The people renamed the square, the street and the Co-op., and many other establishments and places in his honour. They were

even considering renaming the town as Dedoushkin, but one fine day Comrade Dedoushkin proved himself to be an unmitigated thief, was tried at the district session and sent to prison for three years' strict confinement and loss of rights. The governors of the town Kalinoff had their heads together for a long time considering how they could honourably get out of this uncomfortable situation. It was no use throwing money away over such a criminal in the purchase of new tables and signs, and after some time they decided to place "deceased" before the name of Dedoushkin and trouble no further about the matter. Thus Dedoushkin was finally annulled.

At the other end of "Deceased Dedoushkin Square" a workman in cap and high boots was walking with a goose under his arm. His whole appearance and that of the goose was one of such utter dejection that it cannot be expressed in words. He walked so slowly that it sometimes seemed that he wasn't walking at all, but standing on one spot, raising one knee

in front of himself and considering whether he should put it down or not.

"This is a fine place, this town Kalinoff, that's all I have to say," grumbled Philip Stephanovitch, puffing at his cigarette. "They don't sell vodka, the tea-rooms are closed, the people apparently are dull, and even their Comrade Dedoushkin is deceased. We are like fools at a fair. The provinces—an absolute wash-out!"

"You are quite right about the citizens being dull," the cabman interposed quickly, running forward and peering up at Philip Stephanovitch as if at the sun. "Your words are very true. The people are dull because they are waiting for vodka. Let's hope that we shall live until to-morrow and taste the 40° stuff. And the tea-room will be open soon, you can be sure of that . . . there, they are opening it now. . . ."

And indeed at that moment the doors of the Eagle Tavern were opened. The peasants who were seated on the steps of the hostel looked at each other leisurely and moved in a straggling

line to the "Eagle," and a little later, when no one was seated on the steps, the door of the hostel opened. Accompanied by the driver, Philip Stephanovitch and young Ivan entered the "Eagle" and demanded a room. Seeing prospective guests the landlord commenced to fuss terribly and called the servant. The servant, in shirt-sleeves, at once put on the floor the large samovar with which he was tripping from the kitchen, wiped his hands on his apron and ran quickly upstairs. Then up the stairs ran a peasant woman with a bronze candlestick and two logs in her hands, looking as though she were frightened to death.

"Where on earth have you put the key of No. 1?" came in a hiss from somewhere; "can't you see that embezzlers from the centre have arrived? Do get a move on, you fool."

After this the landlord led the colleagues upstairs into a wood-partitioned room, covered inside in the manner of a sentry's box with strips of paper—blue and yellow. In the room stood a table, a couch, an iron bedstead with wooden planks and no mattress, and a

chest of drawers. Over the chest of drawers hung a dull mirror which seemed to be made of copper rather than glass, it was so wavy. A chandelier which held a bouquet of paper roses and green foliage instead of candles was reflected in the mirror. While the driver, who for some unknown reason had entered the room with the colleagues, stood twisting his hat in his hands and tittering like a Chinaman, congratulated them on their safe arrival, and while Philip Stephanovitch was puffing smoke through his nostrils and looking over the landlord and all the staff who were herded in the door with a superior air, scolding them that there was no vodka, and with a fine sense of what should be done ordering a complete breakfast of complicated dishes, which, however, only resulted in eggs and sausages from the bar, young Ivan stood by the window, gazing down into the square. He gazed and could not understand how it should happen that he should stand here suddenly and see through the window the town of Kalinoff, which was so well known to him, seen by him

in his childhood and quite forgotten, and still just the same place as though all the recent happenings had never been. It seemed as though everything in the memory between that old Kalinoff and this one should be deleted and that there should be nothing between them, no call to arms in the year '16, no service in the camp bakery, nor in the regimental orderly-room in Moscow, no evacuation centres, no battalion sentry in the Red Army, no Labour Exchange, no department of Comrade Tourkestansky nor house in the Meat Market, where behind the wooden partition perhaps even at this moment the little lamp was burning under a green shade . . . none of this had ever happened. There only was and only is now before his eyes the town Kalinoff, and round the town the district Kalinoff, in the middle of which is the rural district of Ouspensky, and in the corner of Ouspensky where the Bourginsky Forest ends and the river Kalinovka makes a wide bend, between the forest and the meadows stands the village of Upper Berezouka, which, when

the water is high, is flooded right up to the church . . . and where in summer the children run to the river to catch the small fishes, and where in winter they go across the meadows to the school. . . . There, mothers fill in the gaps in the log huts with straw, and the windows are quite small . . . and the village is crimson with berries . . . and father returns for the winter with his workmates from the town. . . . There isn't much land, and what there is isn't much good, doesn't yield enough to feed them . . . the peasant has to work for his keep. . . . There in the yard sister Grusha milks the cow, and near by someone is repairing the cart . . . and the shadow of the pronged oven fork flies like a devil across the hut when the grandmother fusses over the stove in the evening. . . . In the cradle a child is crying, and in the district the postmen delivering the mail are armed with revolvers and swords. . . . In the forest the moss is damp and the glow-worms shine . . . the sound of the watermill can be heard in the distance . . . the ferry-boat

moves across the river . . . and still further away is the railway and the town Kalinoff, the market town with its beauty and places of interest—market square, fire station, hotel, and its many wonderful churches . . . and there beyond the window is Kalinoff in full view, the workman with the goose, rain falling on the snow and the hay, the peasant with the cow standing in the middle of the square, flocks of noiseless crows flying in the leaden-coloured sky and dropping behind the roofs like so many hats thrown up in the air by a hidden crowd.

And meanwhile the servant brought into the room a dish of eggs and the tea. The driver, who was invited by Philip Stephanovitch to take a bite, seated himself with an affected modesty and an air of resigned pleasure on the edge of a chair, blowing on the dish and politely nibbling his rusk. Young Ivan took a seat, and after rinsing the glass drank tea very eagerly, but didn't have any eggs—he didn't want them now. Philip Stephanovitch only pecked with his fork, and didn't finish his

eggs, and so the whole dish was eaten by the driver, who left only two morsels of sausage. Becoming warm from the effects of the tea, the colleagues unfastened their coats, rested their heads on their fists and plunged into meditation, vainly considering what they could do next—they could think of nothing. What a town Kalinoff was, absolutely nothing to do; it was so dull that they even wished to sleep.

"And does it mean, then, that one can get nothing of this sort in Kalinoff?" asked Philip Stephanovitch sadly waving, raising his fingers in front of the face of the driver.

"No," said the driver, rousing himself from a drowsiness and blinking his eyes—"nothing of that sort at all. Thank you so much for the tea. People were unprepared and hadn't time to get anything in. It will be all right tomorrow when they start selling it again."

"Then what are the people in Kalinoff drinking now—or have they stopped drinking altogether?"

"Some have stopped, they are waiting for

the 40°; others are drinking home-brewed."

"Where do they get it from?"

"I know they get it in the villages; a bottle of the best sort costs one rouble twenty kopeks. It not only has a flavour, but is so strong that it burns the throat; it is much better than vodka."

The driver jumped up from his seat and began to fume, waving his long arms, and said that they had only to say the word and he would go to the nearest village and bring possibly a quart back with him. It was eight kilometres there and eight back, so he could return with a drink for dinner. Young Ivan sighed and remarked quietly that perhaps it would be better if they all went to Upper Berezouka village, which was only about thirty kilometres away, and where were his mother and relatives, where they would receive of the best and not be swindled, and could stay the night if they wished.

"Why not?" exclaimed Philip Stephanovitch. "Quite right. Investigating is investigating. Is there anything we have missed

here? Let us all go to Upper Berezouka, eh?"

And excited by the new project which had appeared before him, Philip Stephanovitch rearranged his pince-nez, looked along his nose, and at the same time pictured himself as something between one of high social standing hunting in winter with the hounds, and someone driving in a smart troika with carpets, bells, beautiful women, staying at country houses . . . with the new moon shining over the bath-house, glistening snow, punch burning with a blue flame, and other things . . . and he even went red with excitement. On the spot the colleagues arranged the fare with the driver, who quite fell in with their proposals; they settled their account with the landlord, reserved their room, promising to return on the morrow for dinner, when there would be some vodka, and without losing any time descended the staircase. As the driver was not a local man, they decided to ask the peasants in the teashop the exact way to Upper Berezouka. The peasants, sitting over teapots like ancient Greek philosophers, gave attention to

their inquiries, gazed at each other, stroked their beards, conferred, then one of them on behalf of all the others explained the way in great detail, telling them exactly which village they would reach first, which way they must then turn, over which bridge they must cross, and then again which turn, where at Kuskinskaya they would find the watermill—not the one which had been burned down last year, but another—there the miller's wife had only one eye, and there was a ferry-boat for crossing the river. At this point a miserable-looking old man who was sitting some distance away shook his head doubtfully, and mumbled that by going such a way they wouldn't get anywhere, they must go in quite a different direction, towards Klimovka: Berezouka was quite near there. When it was explained to him that they didn't want Berezouka, but Upper Berezouka, the old man turned sideways from the company and growled in annoyance, "And I thought they wanted just Berezouka, and they are going to Upper Berezouka. You ought to have said so. Upper Berezouka is one

thing, just Berezouka quite another . . . the roads to these places don't meet . . . you should have said so at first . . . there is Upper Berezouka and just Berezouka . . . and then there was a Lower Berezouka, but it was burned out about thirty years ago. . . ."

And for about half an hour the old man mumbled in his beard with displeasure about the muddle with Berezouka, but no one paid any attention to him.

Philip Stephanovitch entered the sledge and departed.

"Wait a minute!" shrieked Philip Stephanovitch suddenly, full of desire to lead and impress. "Stop! How can we go without presents? Ah! Oh no! If we go as visitors to relatives we must take presents. Isn't that so, cashier? Stop for a minute, driver. We must take such a surprise, comrade, that your mother will be dumbfounded. Something magnificent!"

Philip Stephanovitch gazed around and saw the peasant with the cow.

"A cow," he exclaimed, "a cow! How's

that? Have you anything to say against a cow, cashier? Something very necessary in a rural establishment. They will be aghast! There will be a furore! General delight! A cow, a cow! Your mother will be mad with delight, I am sure."

With these words, with an agility remarkable for his years, he jumped from the sledge and had bought the cow so quickly that the peasant didn't realise exactly what had happened.

Philip Stephanovitch patted the newly-bought cow on its side, where the markings resembled a map of Australia, tied the animal to the back of the sledge, seated himself and pulled up the cover, and called to the amazed driver, "Now, go on," and, full of self-satisfaction, gave young Ivan a dig in the side with his elbow.

"Gee up!" shouted the driver, setting his mouse-coloured horse at a gallop, and he beat his gloved hands across his chest. What next could happen? one couldn't lose anything with such fares!

The astonished cow lowered its head and trotted behind the sledge.

The travellers were soon far away from the town.

And the peasant who had sold the cow stood for a long time in the middle of Deceased Dedoushkin Square, holding his hat in one hand and a hundred and twenty roubles in the other, getting wet in the drizzle, and simply couldn't collect his senses or move from the spot.

CHAPTER X

YOUNG IVAN had neither been home nor seen his mother for ten years. She had at first written letters and sent messages to him, but they had stopped. Sometimes he felt that neither she nor the village of Upper Berezouka had ever existed. But as soon as the mouse-colored little horse had at last dragged along the slippery road to the top of the hill, young Ivan's heart began to beat wildly with excitement. The village was there, just ahead, grey log huts with ornamental window decorations cut out of blue-painted wood, horses looking over the tops of the palings, thatched roofs from which the smoke curled. The street, with its fences and flower-gardens, had red patches of berries, touched by the night frost and pecked by the birds, splashed here and there along both sides, dazzling the eyes. It seemed almost as though this

improvised splash of colour was the only means of keeping the people there, living beneath the dull sky, with that dull village outlook, between the surrounding forest which filled the air with a watery, autumnal scent of pine trees.

At the beginning of the village a large peasant woman in a large kerchief and an ill-fitting man's jacket was stuffing the crevices of her hut with straw.

"Stop!" shrieked young Ivan, "stop! Mother!" And he jumped out of the sledge.

The peasant woman turned towards the road, screwed up her eyes, saw the sledge with the cow tied at the back, the mouse-coloured little horse, the visitors from town, and made two or three steps forward, dropping her bundle of straw. Through the window appeared the scared face of a woman, then disappeared. Then the same face, now in a kerchief, flashed across another window. A door banged and from the porch an uncouth girl in high felt boots ran out. Both women threw up their hands and hurled themselves on the cow,

which stood, panting, behind the sledge, licking the back of Philip Stephanovitch's overcoat.

"Why, it is our Bourenka," yelled the large woman in despair, and she grasped Philip Stephanovitch by the sleeve. "Where did you find our beast, tell me? And the rope round her horns is the same. Here it is, all the village can prove that the rope is made here. What on earth, God forgive me, has happened?"

"Tell us, do tell us, what you have done with Danilo, you thieves!" the girl said, wiping her broad face with her kerchief and running quickly round the sledge. "Since he took the cow to Kalinoff the day before yesterday he has disappeared. I felt in my heart that something was wrong. Do say what you did with the peasant."

"What is the matter with you, mother? are you crazy?" uttered young Ivan at last, quite taken aback by the shrieking of the women; "haven't you recognised me?"

Here the peasant woman glanced at him, looked more closely, went pale and gasped.

"You, Ivan," said she quietly, crossed herself and clutched her bosom; "upon my oath, young Ivan. And we thought you were dead. But how can it be? . . . Ah, my God . . . young Ivan!"

And the woman, trembling between laughter and tears, pulled her little Ivan to her large bosom.

"Young Ivan, my town brother!" exclaimed the girl, shyly putting her face on his shoulder.

Then everything about the cow was explained. It appeared that the present which they had bought for her was the same cow which young Ivan's mother had despatched the day before by a peasant friend, Danilo, her daughter's sweetheart, to be sold in the town Kalinoff. So Philip Stephanovitch's anticipation of a furore and general delight was not realised. But there was no end to astonishment. Philip Stephanovitch, who had managed, under the direction of the driver, to get thoroughly drunk on home-brewed after several stops on the road, alighted with dignity

from the sledge, raised his hat, bowed unsteadily in all directions and uttered through his nose a haughty condescending sound—something halfway between "I am very pleased" and "Please be seated"—and immediately began to talk such inexplicable rubbish about reconnoitring the village, the old Sabakin, the swindling representative, the bloody Tsar Nicholas, Isabella and other things, that the women were absolutely tongue-tied with fright and respect, and the driver exclaimed in a drunken voice, "Gee up," and clapped his arms across his chest with sheer delight.

Then the welcome guests were shown into the hut. Alyoshka (on the journey it had been gathered that the crafty driver answered to just Alyoshka) unharnessed and arranged for the stabling of his horse, after which he also entered the hut, and after praying with deceitful fervour to the icons, seated himself on a bench just within the door—"the cobbler doesn't go beyond his last." The little sister Grusha had put the cow in the shed and seated

herself with modestly lowered eyes at her handloom, pulling the thread through the wooden comb. The mistress herself, who after a long period of widowhood had become accustomed to being regarded as head of the household, put her great elbows on the table at which the guests were seated in the places of honour, and began chatting in a matter-of-fact tone, and although she was talking really for young Ivan's benefit, she addressed herself rather to Philip Stephanovitch, sensing in him a superiority over her son, and a person imbued with authority and respectability. And she did this with such natural aplomb that she looked at times like a man with a strong peasant beard on her face, and her eyes searched from beneath bushy peasant eyebrows as though to see clearly to what sort of man she was talking, what he had in his mind, and whether he really was all that he appeared to be.

As the early evening was drawing on, and as an old peasant woman was fussing unseen at the other side of the room with pans and a

samovar, the widow told without haste the story of her life, as though she were making a very detailed report. The land was bringing in little, and there wasn't much of it. It was impossible to live by selling, and there was no man in the house. Grusha was to marry Danilo, the son of the dead peasant Nikifor, in the autumn. He was a quiet fellow, not very young. The wedding had to be celebrated, but how could it be done? It had been necessary to send the cow to Kalinoff market to be sold, otherwise they couldn't have done anything. The cow, thank goodness, had been brought back without expense, but she had to be fed and there was nothing to feed her on. Grandma might die to-day or to-morrow—she was weak. The surveyor had been round during the summer, measuring the land. What was the use of measuring it? it didn't matter how it was done; if you hadn't any land, then it couldn't be measured. Then the miller was grasping—where else would you find one who took six pounds for every forty he milled? And the miller lived like a bour-

geois, had, without the least lying, fifteen geese, apart from other things. Flax had grown rather well that year. It was possible to manage. But things were so difficult with no man in the house.

The widow said a lot more in the same strain, smiling sadly through the imaginary beard, and showed as she smiled that two front teeth were missing, apparently her late husband had not been distinguished by a too kindly disposition. And it was difficult to understand whether she laughed over these misfortunes or merely covered them with a laugh, whether she was complaining or merely talking for the sake of amusing her guests.

Philip Stephanovitch listened with a drunken attention to the widow and raised his eyebrows over his swollen eyes, puffed cigarette smoke through his moustache as though he wanted to say, "So! Very well. Don't upset yourself, madam. You can rely on me. I will put everything right for you."

Young Ivan snatched glances round the hut

in which he had been born, saw the articles which he remembered so well from childhood—the wall clock with weights, the lamp under its tin shade, the icons, pictures, faded photographs, a peasant overcoat on a nail near the door, the tub and ladling can, the wooden handloom with its foot treadle—and he felt as if he had never parted from them, but had been living all the time among these things, so well were they known to him. And his mother's words were just the same, all so well known in childhood—the miller, the surveyor, the cow, and the innkeeper . . . and they only aroused in young Ivan's heart a dullness which turned into an overwhelming despair. No, it was impossible that these things which had intervened had ever happened. Somehow they couldn't have been.

It was already dark outside, and Grusha lit the lamp. For the moment the shadow of the oven fork ran through the hut like a devil. And it was impossible to escape from this depression; one had to sit, and listen, and look on—and beyond that there was absolutely

nothing to be done. Alyoshka, sitting near the door, hid his yawns behind his sleeve, waiting for time when food should be served. Philip Stephanovitch also lapsed into a sullen, drunken silence.

Meanwhile the news that her son and another person with spectacles had come from town to the hut of widow Klukvin, that the other was young Ivan's chief, that they were both drunk and that they had brought with them the cow, and that it seemed they had come to reconnoitre for some purpose not yet known, spread through the whole village.

The peasants, as was usual, waited until evening, and then went a few at a time to call upon the widow, in order to have a look at the visitors from town and to hear such clever talk as is usual from visitors. The most esteemed of the old men went first; they were followed by the relatives, then the more bold of the remainder, then the purely inquisitive, and lastly the youths and bold women. Thus, by the time the visitors had finished taking tea, so many people were assembled in the hut that

the place was almost filled to suffocation. Everyone entered acording to his or her age and social position. The esteemed old men entered openly, very seriously and precisely, without haste, shook hands with the hostess and the guests and silently took seats near them. The relatives entered sideways, in a body, hats in hand and winking knowingly, as if to say, "We are here as members of the family"; but they shook hands with the hostess only and took seats behind the old men on benches nearer the wall, saying a few agreeable words to the guests. The others shuffled into the door rather than entered, trying to take up as little space as possible, greeted neither the hostess nor the visitors, and seated themselves quietly wherever they could find room, stroking their beards and coughing behind their hands, just like professors meeting at a conference of some learned society. The youths and the bold women entered on tiptoe with long faces and stood in the doorway, peeping into the hut with their jaws between their fingers.

But however small and uncomfortable the hut might appear, it accommodated all the visitors, in fact there was just a little space to spare. As usual, everyone was silent at first. They looked Philip Stephanovitch over and began winking to each other, nodding and nudging one another with their patched elbows, until at last they pushed forward one of the old men, wearing steel-rimmed spectacles, and with a learned look, whom they had induced to talk. It appeared that he was the star local debater.

"Go on, go on, Ivan Antonovitch," could be heard in whispers from all sides; "talk with the comrades about things in general." "For example, about the surveyor," someone remarked.

The esteemed old man fidgeted about as though to edge back, but actually edging forward, rearranged his spectacles, coughed, looked all round timidly and blew his nose emphatically in a cotton handkerchief, then raised his eyebrows over his spectacles, and with a wave of the hand began the conversa-

tion by addressing Philip Stephanovitch in an incredibly childish voice:

"You will excuse us as ignorant people, and you, as it might be said, of the highest education. In the paper, *The Proletariat,* there is an article about France . . . as though to say . . . how could one understand it? . . . is war being prepared? . . ."

"Certainly!" Philip Stephanovitch cut him short, feeling that he was the centre of general attention and esteem. "We shall beat them!"

And with a superior air he looked round the gathering of bald heads, beards, peasants' coats and jackets.

"Just so," said the old man quickly and somewhat confusedly, and winked to the audience. "Look at the sort of ammunition the town has provided. Just wait and we will have him with his back against the wall. We are not quite fools. We understand. And by what right does the miller, for example, in spite of the power of the workers and peasants under the Soviet, take six pounds for every forty milled?"

"He has no moral right," said Philip Stephanovitch severely. "Certainly not!"

"So . . ."

"Ah, Ivan Antonovitch," came a mocking voice, "that is one for you."

The old man became quite confused, blinked behind his spectacles, blew his nose and shook his head. Then he waved his handkerchief defiantly and began to fire off questions, each one more complicated than the last. But he hadn't fallen on easy ground. Philip Stephanovitch wished for nothing better than this. He just liked to astonish people and to put them at a loss with his superior intellect. The old man would thrust out his question—bang! and bang! came the answer from Philip Stephanovitch. So he parried, and always with the winning thrust, absolutely lost all sense of right and wrong, and uttered nothing but a tissue of lies. The peasants were so delighted that they lost their proper seats as they pressed nearer to the garrulous accountant (who was going at full speed); they applauded loudly, puffed out clouds of tobacco smoke and urged:

"Get at him; that's right, comrades, carry on."

Soon Philip Stephanovitch had completely wiped the old man up and the gathering had pushed forward another of his kind. But Philip Stephanovitch was unconquerable. His nose shone and his pince-nez kept falling from it. Tobacco smoke puffed out through his moustache, his eyes rolled wildly. He was uttering absolute nonsense.

"That's enough, Philip Stephanovitch," whispered young Ivan in despair, pulling the accountant discreetly by the sleeve—"as if they understand anything. You have said enough now. If you don't stop you will be saying something . . ."

But it was impossible to stop Philip Stephanovitch. He was standing up in the place of honour, lurching, wild and perspiring, smiling haughtily, muttering clearly and definitely nothing but rubbish.

". . . sorry . . . sorry . . . I beg you . . . cherry brandy . . . I have the honour . . . I and my cashier young Ivan, who is seated here

. . . what of young Ivan . . . and the old Sabakin . . . twelve thousand on current account in the State bank . . . and he says to me, We will cover . . . and I told him: Fool, and that's that! . . . Isn't it so? . . . How, I said, cover, when there is nothing to cover with? I say. . . . Isn't that correct, cashier? . . . And the miller, to the devil's mother with him . . . into the water. I will buy a mill for every one of you. Do you want it or not? We will go to-day—this very moment. Cashier, give each one according to order, enough for the purchase . . . and that's that."

At this stage he had finished off the second debater, and one of the relatives, merry and already drunk, approached the table and insinuated in every possible way that a drink was essential on such an occasion. An accordion was being played in the doorway. Alyoshka whispered something to the old woman; young Ivan took some money from his pocket, and in ten minutes yellow bottles with paper stoppers appeared on the window ledge.

The peasant wife, her face coming out in red blotches, suddenly saw clearly why young Ivan had come, why he had money, and who Philip Stephanovitch was. Everything was clear. Until then she had been happy. Her son would stay at home, she had thought, he would be at Grusha's wedding, and perhaps stay quietly on in the village and find work to occupy him in the house. After all, it would be quite different to have a man about the house. And now it appeared so wrong, such a sin, that it was better not to look people in the face. Until then she had been wishing heartily that the guests would leave soon, so that she could be alone with her son, see him to bed, comb his hair, talk, ask his advice. And now, nothing mattered. Let them all stay, until dawn if they liked.

With a resigned and bitter smile she rose from the table and went about her household duties. Brought in a loaf of bread and some pickled mushrooms, four glasses, a fork and some salt. Put everything on the table and bowed low.

Then the merriment began.

Several times young Ivan lurched out from the smoky hut into the cool porch. He opened the door and stood in despair, listening. It was thawing. Snow melted on the road, melted and dripped from the roofs. In the darkness the rain pattered unevenly on the rowans. In the distance he could hear songs being sung to the strains of an accordion. Probably youths returning from some gathering, but to young Ivan it seemed as though the dull drunken merriment had escaped from the smoky hut and was moving about at the other end of the village, from yard to yard, in melancholy songs to the tune of the accordion, under the drunken rowans, along the wet streets. Young Ivan thrust his head out in the wind, but the wind could not still the wild anguish which consumed him to the very inmost recess of his heart. What could be done now? What could follow? Everything was impossible—nowhere to go, nowhere to ride; and if one did go away, then where, and why, and for what purpose? And for the first time during

this period young Ivan suddenly, simply and clearly saw that he had ruined himself and that there was no way out. His anguish was such that he could hang himself. He returned to the house, smilingly drank the stinking home-brewed, sang songs, kissed people; then again went into the porch, listening in the wind to the drunken whisperings of the night, yellow spots passing before his eyes. The celebrations were protracted—it was already past midnight. Alyoshka had run out several times, stumbling along with empty bottles and returning with full ones. The chairman of the local Soviet, who was returning late from an inspection, having heard of what was going on, looked in at the Klukvin hut to see the arrivals. Tall, pleasant and young, and wearing an open-necked tennis shirt, he bowed as he entered the door and in a moment looked round the assembly.

"May I introduce myself, chairman of the local Soviet, Sazonoff?" he said to Philip Stephanovitch, and shook hands effusively.

He greeted young Ivan in the same way and

nodded to the others, his fair hair falling over his forehead, then with a bow seated himself in the chair which had been placed for him near the hostess, stretched out his smartly shod feet, and smiled gaily, his cheeks dimpling like those of a young girl, his blue eyes shining.

However, he didn't stay long, listened attentively to the lying chatter of Philip Stephanovitch, asked several questions, agreed once or twice, drank a glass of home-brewed in order not to offend the company, joked with Grusha, who had remained seated at her handloom, and then went away, saying that he had not had enough sleep, and expressing the hope that the company would remain happily and continue with their merrymaking. In fact he appeared to be a jolly nice fellow. About midnight Danilo returned, soaked through by the rain. It was the same peasant, the sweetheart of Grusha, from whom they had bought the cow in Kalinoff. After hearing what had happened he sat just as he was, in coat and cap, in a corner and remained, gaping with astonish-

ment, until everyone had forgotten about him.

After midnight the guests went home. A heavy, spirituous atmosphere hung about the hut. The peasant wife yawned in the act of making the sign of the Cross and languidly flicked the smoky air with her duster. Grusha cleared the crockery and prepared the beds. Alyoshka had found time to come to terms with an ugly-looking girl, and having taken a hurried glance at his horse, went off to sleep with her at the other end of the village. Philip Stephanovitch lay flat on a bench, his hand hanging down on the floor. He groaned as with difficulty he raised his blue chin.

Young Ivan, tumbling over the edges of various articles in the darkness, fumbled his way to the entrance porch and went from there with shaking steps down to the shed, with its well-remembered warm smell of liquid manure, animals and fowls. He felt round the cart, climbed on to it. From a shaft hung some reins. He tried their strength, made a loop and then, as if in a dream, standing unsteadily on tiptoes, put his head into it.

The cart squeaked. The plank fell from under his stiffened legs. A frightened hen fell from its nest like a cauliflower and began beating its wings in the darkness, creating a dry and suffocating dust. Then a second and third joined her, until from all corners could be heard the noise of excited birds; feathers were flying in the air. And his mother, sensing that something wrong was happening, had just time to rush to the shed and take the half-dead young Ivan out of the noose. He was choking and crying.

Nearly crawling, she took him into the room and laid him in the bed which had been arranged on the floor near Philip Stephanovitch. She handed him the ladle, but he didn't want a drink; she stroked his wet dishevelled hair with her rough palm, saying all the time:

"What a shame, ah, what a shame . . ." and tears dripped down her great face.

"You don't understand things, mother," uttered young Ivan at last, and turning his back he began to take slow breaths. . . .

"I understand everything, young Ivan, oh,

I do undertsand. . . . What a shame! . . . Be brave, young Ivan . . . bear it. God bore it and orders us to do the same."

"I am miserable, mother. . . . I shall be imprisoned," muttered young Ivan thickly, then he was silent.

During the night a knock came at the window, and outside in the darkness was seen the pale face of Alyoshka. He ran immediately into the room, stamping his felt boots and stumbling about.

"Mistress, come here. Waken the travellers. We must go. Bad luck. Our village Soviet chairman has been to the district office, and sent for the police, I swear on the Cross. He wants to arrest them. Says he has his suspicions. . . . Waken them, waken them. I have harnessed the horse already. Hurry. It is thawing outside. I hope the road won't give, or else perhaps we can't get away in the sledge. We shall get stuck, in all this trouble, in the middle of some field."

Philip Stephanovitch and young Ivan came to themselves and at once jumped to their feet.

"To arrest whom! . . . on no account!" exclaimed Philip Stephanovitch haughtily, but he weakened at the same moment and hurriedly tumbled into the sledge, crouching on the seat. He muttered:

"Village chairman! to the devil with the village chairman; who is he? Tell me, please. . . . Provinces—absolute darkness. . . . Chairman! And I, perhaps, am Count Guido with my own cashier. . . . Is it clear . . ."

"Good-bye, mother," said young Ivan, his teeth chattering in the cold night air which took hold of him as he went into the yard and entered the sledge.

The colleagues put the cover over their feet and the sledge moved off. The mother ran behind them, her feet splashing in the water. She kept trying to catch and embrace her son, but the angry wind blew her hair about her face and she could not see in the darkness. A cock crowed in the village.

"You will at least write a letter, young Ivan," she shouted between her tears. "Do

write a letter. God speed you." The wind carried her voice aside; she remained standing, and the sledge disappeared in the darkness, screeching on the uncovered patches of earth as it went down the hill.

"Gee up," shrieked Alyoshka angrily, tugging at the reins. . . . "The chairman won't catch up to us . . . eh . . . perhaps."

In the complete darkness, distinguishing the road with difficulty, they entered a terrifying forest, and when they emerged behind the pine trees and stumps of burned-down trees the sky was already lighting up. Dawn was breaking. It began to feel more cold and the road became harder. The ice cracked and broke under the horse's hoofs. Schoolboys with their canvas satchels were crossing over the snow-covered fields near the village.

"Good-morning, uncles," the children shrieked in their high-pitched voices when they saw the sledge, and they waved their hats. "Unc . . . unc . . . unc . . ." echoed their calls foggily from the distant forest. From the side, emerging from behind the forest, a

river appeared. The noise of the mill could be heard. The colleagues huddled close together in the chill morning air.

"Why did you take it, Philip Stephanovitch?" suddenly said young Ivan quietly, opening his frozen jaws with difficulty. "We ought not to have done this, Philip Stephanovitch."

And having said this, he drooped resignedly, straightened himself to overcome his shivering, and during the whole journey to the town did not utter another word.

CHAPTER XI

TOWARDS EVENING they arrived at Kalinoff, the journey had lasted the whole day. The snow melted on the road. It rained. The sledge sides kept going into such holes and ruts that it seemed as though their end might come at any moment. However, they scrambled out. They had used all their cigarettes and matches and couldn't get any more. They had turned in once or twice to the village stores, but all that could be bought there were ropes and pails. They waited for the ferry for about two hours, screaming at the top of their voices across the river, but in the end they could wait no longer and waded. They were up to their knees in the blue water and small pieces of ice circled round. When they were within five kilometres of the town the horse stopped in the middle of some wooden arched bridge, and standing obsti-

nately with his trembling legs fixed widely apart, and puffing out steam, he could neither be induced to move forward nor backward from the spot. They beat him, threatened him, dragged him by the bit with menacing shrieks —all to no avail. They got out of the sledge. The horse stood like this for no less than an hour, then took breath and quite voluntarily moved along. About one and a half kilometres from Kalinoff they had to walk at the side of the sledge through some absolutely unnegotiable slush, then when the horse got through they took their seats. And already the not distant forest became indistinct in the twilight like a rainy cloud. A green lantern twinkled on the railway.

The town Kalinoff was unrecognisable. Where was its previous dullness? The windows of the saloons and wineshops were flaming. Crowds of people stood near them. The rainy sky over the railway station was lit up by red smoke. Four electric standards illuminated Deceased-comrade Dedoushkin Square. From all sides could be heard the sound of ac-

cordions and the strumming of balalaikas. The inhabitants of Kalinoff, drunk as owls, were wandering about the streets and side streets. In every direction could be heard wild songs, the unaccountable muttering and din of the crowd. Under the furthermost standard a fight was in progress and the onlookers filled half the square. Even the rain stank of liquor. The only sober person was a policeman, frightened to death, who was creeping along the side of the wall like a cat, trying not to step on any drunkard and not to attract attention to himself.

"Gee up!" shrieked Alyoshka, delightedly, approaching the saloon. "Gee up! This is the real Kalinoff. Good old Kalinoff! Ah, let's try the taste of the 40° before they drink it all up. We have just come in time. I congratulate you on your safe arrival!"

Philip Stephanovitch sniffed the air and pulled himself together.

"That's right. It is essential that we should reconnoitre," said he fussily as he got out of the sledge. "What's wrong with you, young

Ivan, eh? Spit on everything and let us go and drink the 40° vodka. Do rely on me. Cherry brandy . . . Château Yquem . . . some herring and cucumber. . . . What really is the matter? Life is wonderful. Twelve thousand on account . . . a villa in Finland . . . Credit Lyonnais . . . wine . . . women . . . lots of pleasures. . . . Cashier, follow me!"

"Let us go on," exclaimed young Ivan with a break in his voice. "What's the use? Let us go on."

And they were at it again. For two more days the colleagues drank vodka in Kalinoff under the direction of Alyoshka, until they were bloated and quite wild. When they came to themselves it was day and they found that they were again travelling in a train. They were not astonished that such a thing should happen; on the contrary, it would have been strange if they hadn't been travelling somewhere.

"We are travelling, Phillip Stephanovitch," said young Ivan somewhat indiffer-

ently as he turned over in the upper berth of an uncomfortable carriage.

"We are travelling," said Philip Stephanovitch below, and fumbling in his pockets he drew out a squashed box of "Chic" cigarettes. He looked it over from all sides, read that it was from the Koursk tobacco factory, of the "Nymph"—an unknown brand—sniffed it, said "Um," took out a cigarette and lit it. Half of the tobacco at once fell out of the paper on to his tongue. The paper shrivelled, went out and curled up, and from the cigarette a green smoke poured noisily out, with the smell of burning goat's hair.

On the opposite seat a figure with head wrapped in a Scotch plaid stirred, and a well-modulated voice said:

"I would ask you not to smoke. Ugh! This is a non-smokers' compartment."

"Well, I never!" thought the offended Philip Stephanovitch. However, he pressed the cigarette on the seat, and with disgust in his heart went out to the lavatory to spit the rotten taste out of his mouth and to get a

drink of water. As he stood trying to balance on his unsteady legs to the movement of the train, he drank warm water from the wash-basin and bathed his temple, and through his mind flashed various details of the Kalinoff orgy. It seemed to him that he remembered some moment when the fire brigade, illuminated with torches, rattling and tinkling, had flown past, and in front of it, in a cab, his back turned to the horse, stood someone who appeared to be the chief of police, supported by the district chief of police, not Dedoushkin, but his successor, and he shouted, "It has commenced. People, be merry! I declare a general holiday." . . . And perhaps this hadn't happened. . . . In the Château des Fleurs restaurant, which had, of course, appeared in Kalinoff, the now quite familiar Jews in their pantaloons had apparently arrived on a special engagement and were performing on the stage their Ukrainian national dances. . . . Then they slept the sleep of the dead in some basement behind a screen at the side of some stout woman, and in the morning

drank from pickled cucumber bottles in order to drive away their terrible headaches. Two girls had gone with the stout woman; a fluffy dog joined them in the yard and bit Alyoshka's leg. They drank 40° vodka in the room, listened to the gramophone, the girls, with strongly made-up eyebrows, giggled and nipped them under their chins. . . . Then, so it seemed, they bought a case of vodka and seventy-five roubles' worth of lobster in the saloon and handed it out freely in the middle of the square to anybody who wanted it. The crowd swarmed round, people quarrelled, screamed and beat each other in the face with the lobsters. After this they hired every available cab and ordered them to drive empty round Deceased-comrade Dedoushkin Square while they sang folk-songs—the whole town of Kalinoff seemed to gather to look at this unique spectacle. They drank cognac in the railway buffet, quarrelled with somebody and had to pay a fine. Early in the morning they saw the red hair of the peasant Danilo, who was again in the square with the cow. They were

greatly astonished. And Danilo bowed low and said, "How can one feed a beast during the winter? I was told to sell it and it must be sold." The rain was drenching both Danilo and the cow. Flocks of crows were flying in the misty air. Then Alyoshka ran up from somewhere and said that Sazonoff, the local Soviet chairman, was in the town with some higher authority, so they must get away, but where they must go he did not say. Probably he had bought the tickets and put them in the train. . . .

"Ugh, what rubbish! Where, however, are we going?"

When Philip Stephanovitch returned to his seat his *vis-à-vis* had already divested himself of his plaid and was sitting on the seat in his woollen underclothing; bare feet in fur-lined slippers, he was rubbing his neck with eau-de-Cologne. Philip Stephanovitch seated himself by the window and began to take sideway glances at him. The *vis-à-vis* was a man of agreeable appearance, fairly robust, even stout, somewhat bald, had a fair moustache

and beard which were showing a few grey hairs; it was one of those beards which before the war were generally carefully perfumed, brushed and combed and parted on two sides, surrounding the pink lips. He had slight swellings under his eyes, and on the outside cushions of his plump fingers grew long hairs like eyelashes. After he had finished rubbing himself with eau-de-Cologne the *vis-à-vis* put on a clean shirt, drew on his socks, took some articles of clothing from beneath the rubber air cushion on which he was sitting and began leisurely to dress. First he thrust his legs into very well made and neatly pressed trousers, fastened his braces, stood upright, thrust out his stomach and shook himself several times to see that the trousers hung properly; then he tied correctly a neat tie with a peacock spot, and finally put on a jacket to match the trousers, new, and with a white handkerchief in the breast pocket. He did not put his boots on—probably he was suffering from corns and didn't want to tire his feet unnecessarily—but remained in his slippers. Having completed

his toilet he let the air out of his cushion, folded his bed neatly and put it in a canvas bag bearing a blue mark. Then he took stock of his luggage in detail; everything appeared to be in order—everything neatly enclosed in grey covers with blue initials in the corners—two bags, a flat trunk, a basket for provisions, a round hat-box and a toilet-case.

"My word," thought Philip Stephanovitch, with a touch of envy—"my word, what an epicure." And at the same moment he hid his own hands with their dirty black nails behind his back. Meanwhile the epicure ate two boiled eggs and drank a cup of cocoa, which, like all the other things, was in a grey case bearing blue initials. Having enjoyed the repast, and leaving his lips covered with egg, he put everything neatly away. Then, having first wiped them with his handkerchief, he started to look through the window with a pair of binoculars. But the scenery through which the train passed was dull and ugly. Then the epicure hung the binoculars on a hook, put on his straight nose a pince-nez with

a gold spring, and taking out of his bag a book and a leather-bound note-book, he began to read, making notes in the note-book with a splendid automatic pencil. Philip Stephanovitch cleverly managed to get a glimpse at the cover of the book and read "Criminal Code." "Eh, eh," he said to himself, and shivered with an uncomfortable chill.

The *vis-à-vis* went on reading, making notes, for at least half an hour, then at last he put the book and note-book away in his travelling bag, closed it with a snap, stretched his chest and arms, said "Eh . . ." and then addressed himself to Philip Stephanovitch in a pleasant mellow voice:

"And, you know, you were brought into this carriage yesterday evening in a fine condition. I am sure you can't even remember, eh? Where on earth had you been with your friend, eh? Excuse me, I haven't the honour; allow me to present myself—Engineer Sholte, Nicolas Nicolaivitch."

"Very pleased to meet you," said Philip Stephanovitch, trying to assume a dignified

expression, but the dignified expression didn't materialise. "Philip Stephanovitch Prohoroff of the Finance Department, and this is my cashier, Comrade Klukvin, young Ivan."

"Are you going far?"

Philip Stephanovitch waved his hand vaguely. Engineer Sholte bowed modestly as if to indicate that he had no intention to pry into any intimate affairs, but that if he asked questions, it was merely for the sake of passing the time pleasantly.

"Are you travelling on private business, may I ask, or on official?"

"On official business, from Moscow," said Philip Stephanovitch, stroking his moustache and glancing up at young Ivan. "I and my cashier, we are travelling on official business. We have investigated, you know, various places. The provinces, you can imagine them yourself, a complete darkness. Really there is absolutely nothing to investigate. Now, of monuments I won't speak—but the rest, no good at all. In the hotels there are fleas, and

no matter where you go, the same troupe of Ukrainian dancers. In the Vladimir Club, it is true, there were palms, but they were artificial; at every turn there is some sort of swindler, all sorts of representatives who won't leave you alone. I show to him 6, and he—7; I show 7, he—8; I have 8, and he—9. In a word, an absolute card-sharper!"

Philip Stephanovitch leaned his head on one side as though to hear himself talk gave him pleasure; it did please him very much and he continued:

"And in the provinces it is even worse. The cab-drivers can't tell twenty-five from fifty kopeks. . . . Some sort of cows are sold on the squares; we had to buy one. And, what is more, wherever you go, everything is named 'Deceased-comrade Dedoushkin.' Every step one takes one is fined for some trivial thing. The ferry-boats are not working, so you have to wade. In the villages, I can tell you, it is an absolute blank. The chairmen of the local So-

viets have passed every limit of impudence. In one place, if you can believe me, they even wanted to arrest us, but I said, 'On no account! What does this mean,' I asked, 'actually?' How can one attempt to investigate after all this? My head is bursting."

The engineer nodded sympathetically with his beard.

"No, I don't care what you say, but in the old days that didn't happen," continued Philip Stephanovitch. "In the old days we would go with old Sabakin at the bar of Lvof to the Sretinsky Gate; there you could get pickled fish and a tumbler of vodka, and be treated with every respect. . . . No!" Here Philip Stephanovitch, who was not yet sober from the bout of the previous day, mounted his hobby-horse and let the engineer know everything.

"And, may I ask you," said the engineer, having listened sympathetically to Philip Stephanovitch, "have you large sums at your disposal? In a word, I would like to say, do you receive much money for your reconnoitring?"

"Well," pronounced Philip Stephanovitch haughtily through his nose, "not too much, ten to twelve thousand," and with his squinting eye he looked at the engineer as though to ask, "How does that suit you, are you astonished?"

"Oh!" said the engineer, rounding his mouth in an "oh" in ecstasy, and closing his eyes. "Oh, that is a considerable sum—very, as you might say, impressive."

"I think so," remarked Philip Stephanovitch indifferently, assuming his dignified expression.

"With such a sum one could investigate half the globe."

"Um . . . yes . . . that is to say . . . um . . . yes . . . that is possible. . . . And you . . . also on official business?"

"On official business, dear sir, on official business," sighed the engineer, "just on official business."

"Do you also investigate?"

"Yes, I also investigate, or it is more correct to say I have finished investigating. I have in-

vestigated everything possible and am now returning home."

"And large sums, pardon me, are large sums at your disposal?"

"Um—about a hundred and fifty roubles of my own and about a thousand and a half advanced. With a certain amount of economy and care one can travel with great taste and have everything one wishes on such a sum. About two and a half or three months. Now, when did I leave? If I am not mistaken, the second of August. Yes, it means I have reconnoitred for about four months. Certainly I haven't gone to extremes, but why should I not take a bottle of foreign wine sometimes? We investigators must keep ourselves within our resources."

Saying these words the engineer somehow winked at Philip Stephanovitch.

"You think so?" said Philip Stephanovitch through his nose, and very much on his dignity.

"Certainly. Economy is of the utmost importance," said the engineer with conviction,

giving special emphasis to the letter "o" in the word "economy." "Certainly. I assure you that without economy reconnoitring can take the most ugly form and give no pleasure at all."

The engineer made a sort of pose, scratched the base of his nose with a finger which bore two rings, and again addressed Philip Stephanovitch:

"The Crimea—have you investigated there?"

"No."

"That is a mistake. The grape season in the Crimea is absolutely wonderful. What a sea! What women! I swear to you before heaven, never in my life have I seen such women. Did you visit the Caucasus?"

Philip Stephanovitch shook his head gloomily.

"My dear sir," the engineer didn't exclaim but almost sang, extracting the utmost richness of heartfelt surprise—"My dear. You were not in the Caucasus! I cannot believe my own ears! It is unheard of! Not to investi-

gate the Caucasus, with your wealth! But in that case you haven't seen anything if you haven't seen the Caucasus—it's a thousand and one nights—a fairy tale of Scheherazade—a poem! The Caucasian military road alone is worth I don't know what—it cannot be imagined—for twenty roubles they drive you in an automobile between sky and earth, and round about are the mountain slopes, cliffs, 'shashlik,' Circassian girls, wine of Kakhetia in large jars—in a word, a symphony of sensations! And then, the mineral spring resorts —Kislovodsk, Jeleznovodsk, Essentooki! What society! What women! I swear to you I never saw such women. It is true the life is somewhat expensive—my budget, for example, reached up to seven or eight roubles a day—but what a life! I am astonished at you, Philip Stephanovitch, upon my word. With your wealth not to have been to the Caucasus! You must go there at once, at once, dear sir! You will be a prince there. There women will carry you on their hands!"

"My word, there's nothing to stop this

engineer," thought Philip Stephanovitch with some offence, and he decided to have a thrust at him.

"And tell me, if you will excuse me, what sort of little book is it I saw you carrying with you? I saw, probably, some interesting novel by Zoshenko?"

"What sort of Zoshenko?" humorously replied the engineer, waving his plump hand; "what interest can I have in Zoshenko when I am returning to the place of my service? This, dear sir, is the 'Criminal Code.' Without it a man is as helpless as though entirely deprived of hands. I thoroughly recommend you to get hold of one."

"And why?"

"But why 'and why'? What if your business involves you in a legal action, what then? You will buy it, but it will be too late. And in any case you must become well armed with points of legal finesse. The chief thing, my dear sir, is to have the last word. The full effect is in the last word, and everything else is as a myth, I assure you."

Here the engineer took out his watch with dangling seals, buried himself in a reckoning and at last said:

"It is a quarter to three. We are eighteen minutes late. Now what sort of arrangement is that? In half an hour we reach Kharkov. I would strongly advise you, Philip Stephanovitch, not to delay going to the Caucasus. At Kharkov just take through tickets to Mineral Waters Station. I would recommend, of course, the *wagon-lit*. With your means the cost is practically nothing, and oh, what comfort! Quite a European way of travelling—mahogany fittings, your own dressing-room, mirrors, perfect service, ideal bed-linen, cool sheets, restaurant attached—a symphony of sensations!"

"That is an idea!" exclaimed Philip Stephanovitch, and a new purpose appeared before him and took possession of his imagination.

"Of course! If I were in your place I should have travelled exclusively, all my life, in *wagon-lits*. But, alas, you must cut your coat according to your cloth. However, with a cer-

tain amount of use one can even in hard carriages arrange oneself with a fair modicum of comfort. But for you, Philip Stephanovitch—pardon me for the frankness—it must be simply shameful to travel about in third-class compartments. So, my dear sir, to the Caucasus, to the Caucasus! You travel, and through the plate-glass window of the compartment you see a marvellous panorama, a picture gallery. First meadows, oxen, natives, misty contours of mountain ranges . . . further on moss and dry shrubbery. And then green valleys, covered with vegetation, where birds sing and the deer jump, and you see people high up in the hills, and sheep moving about in the green pastures. A wonderful spectacle! Byronic!"

The engineer again closed his eyes in ecstasy and cracked his fingers. And Philip Stephanovitch became very excited. He could hardly remain seated in the one place from impatience to come quicker to Kharkov, to get a *wagon-lit* immediately and fly to the Caucasus. Just to the Caucasus and nowhere else. How

was it that the idea hadn't come into his head sooner? They had wandered the devil knows where and hadn't thought of the Caucasus. What a nuisance! But it is finished now. Everything that has happened before is wiped out. And that's that! What had gone before was not the real thing—mere nonsense, absurdity, a blank. The real thing was only now commencing. In Philip Stephanovitch's imagination appeared and disappeared with the quickness of lightning glittering pictures of an imaginary Caucasus, hill-tops covered with snow, cliffs, misty waterfalls, extraordinarily beautiful women, silver daggers at tightly laced waists, general delight and a foaming steed carrying Count Guido, with his hat tilted to one side of his head, along the edge of a precipice.

And as soon as the train approached Kharkov, Philip Stephanovitch began to awaken young Ivan.

"Get up, young Ivan, get up. We are going immediately to the Caucasus in a *wagon-lit.* That's that. Mineral Waters Station. And in

the meantime tickets must be ordered and we must dine." . . . "In the midday heat, in the valley of Dagestan . . ." sang Philip Stephanovitch in a voice trembling with impatience, and he pulled young Ivan by the leg.

"To the Caucasus . . . we will go . . ." said young Ivan mechanically, and resignedly he descended from the top berth with his case under his arm.

"A happy journey," said the engineer, waving his hand. "Lucky ones, I envy you.

'For me is the time to decay,
For you is the time to flower.'

ah ah." He rearranged his pince-nez and again fell to the study of his little book.

The colleagues descended from the train and made for the first-class buffet.

"What station is this?" jadedly asked young Ivan.

"Kharkov, young Ivan, Kharkov, direct line to Mineral Waters Station. The Caucasus, comrade, is something wonderful. You never visited the Caucasus, nor I neither, but they

say it is a first-class watering-place—you will be dumbfounded when you see. *Wagon-lit,* plate glass, ideal linen, restaurant car. Have we done anything as yet, comrade cashier? . . . a lot of pleasures . . . European means of travelling . . . cherry brandy . . . am I speaking correctly . . . we must take some vodka to celebrate this occasion . . . we must warm up."

They approached a luxurious counter adorned with chandeliers and palms and took a large glass of vodka each, then a sandwich and repeated the vodka. Philip Stephanovitch then sent young Ivan to take the *wagon-lit* tickets, and he himself began to walk about the buffet with a superior air, looking round the premises where the tinkling of china, the ringing of glasses, the swelling drone of voices could be heard, seeming to promise a quantity of pleasures as yet unexperienced, a symphony of sensations!

Young Ivan, sleepily dragging his legs, departed and soon, in the same way, sleepily returned.

"There isn't enough money," he said in a tired voice, dragging his finger dreamily along the edge of the flap of his case.

"How not enough money?" exclaimed Philip Stephanovitch in terrible excitement; "that cannot be."

"Quite simple, not enough," said young Ivan. "To the mineral springs by the *wagon-lit* costs a hundred and twenty-six roubles, and I have eleven roubles forty-five kopeks in hand."

"You are mad, you fool!" roared Philip Stephanovitch, getting crimson in the face and unfastening his overcoat. "There were twelve thousand roubles; where can they have gone? It is nonsense!"

"Everything gone, Philip Stephanovitch. Perhaps you have something left?"

His face beginning to cover with a threatening red flush, Philip Stephanovitch grasped the case and his pockets with trembling hands, but there was no money there.

"Allow me," muttered he in a whisper, "allow me. This can't be. Where has it gone?"

"We have spent it all, Philip Stephanovitch," said young Ivan resignedly.

With wandering eyes and fallen jaw, pince-nez slipping and being put on awry, and with many gesticulations, Philip Stephanovitch ran into the gentlemen's cloak-room and began to turn out his pockets. He found a crumpled and torn five-rouble note, and nothing else. An icy, sticky sweat oozed out from the forehead of Philip Stephanovitch. His nose went sharp and hard like that of a corpse. Things went yellow before his eyes, and through the bilious haze waves of water seemed to pass over the tiled walls.

"Sorry, sorry," senselessly pronounced Philip Stephanovitch, grasping young Ivan by the shoulder with his bony fingers. "Sorry. We must count up . . . there is a definite understanding. . . . Wait . . . the hotel, sixty . . . two complete sets 'Pig Rearing,' four hundred . . . tickets, twenty . . . cinema, ten . . . tips, three . . . to Alyoshka, fifteen. . . . But where, if such is the case, is the remainder?"

"We must go, Philip Stephanovitch," said young Ivan quietly.

"Why go? Go where? No, you wait. . . . Tickets, twenty . . . 'Pig Rearing,' four hundred . . . lobsters, seventy-five. . . ."

"What is there to count?" said young Ivan with dull resignation, turning his head away. "We must go to Moscow. Everything will be counted there, if only we have enough left for the tickets."

"You think," choked Philip Stephanovitch, looking round wildly, and it seemed to young Ivan that before his eyes an old man's prickly grey beard began to grow on the face of Philip Stephanovitch, "you think we must go, eh? Yes, that's about it. As quickly as possible. We will settle it all up there on the spot. Let's go!"

With staring, glassy eyes, stooping as though dragging a false limb, Philip Stephanovitch began to fuss towards the booking office. However, they were two roubles short of the fare to Moscow. Philip Stephanovitch remained near the booking office for a minute,

overcome as though the whole ceiling had fallen on him. Then he was suddenly seized and whirled by the senseless energy of madness. He rushed off somewhere to send telegrams, stopped half-way and returned, muttered something, tumbled over, ran about the complicated station in quest of the station-master, demanded from the porters the whereabouts of the commandant, threatened to write a complaint in the book, and jumped away with fright from his own reflection which met him on every side in the gloomy mirrors of the buffet. And young Ivan ran after him, pulling him by the sleeve and whispering that it was not necessary to send telegrams, and that they must go before dark into the town and sell the overcoat in the market. Weakened by all this fuss, Philip Stephanovitch gave way to young Ivan's arguments. They went out of the station, and having asked the way of a Red Army soldier who was passing, soon reached the market. It was already closing up. The police were dispersing the stallholders by whistling. A cold drizzle was falling. Night approached.

The dim lights of the strange town were lighting up all round. Several second-hand clothes dealers ran out. Shivering in the cold, young Ivan took off his short coat. The second-hand dealers turned it inside out, threw it up, offered seventy-five kopeks, made it up to a rouble, said that nobody would give more and went away. Other second-hand dealers approached, looked at the garment, laughed offensively in his face, crumpled it up and said they wouldn't have it for nothing. Then Philip Stephanovitch quickly took off his overcoat. The second-hand dealers cleverly stretched it out beneath the lamp-post, counted the holes and patches, of the existence of which until that moment he had probably not been aware, pushed the worn elbows and pockets into his face, conferred together, and saying that the article was now old-fashioned, offered three and a half roubles. Philip Stephanovitch—but the dealers were already moving away and not even turning round—Philip Stephanovitch ran after them, the loose sole of his shoe clattering in the pools of

rain, threw to them the overcoat, that same overcoat with the astrachan collar, that splendid elegant overcoat which had always seemed to him to be so extraordinary, expensive, solid and everlasting.

Returning they lost their way in the unknown streets. They asked the directon from passers-by while they wandered about the side streets in the approaching night. An angry rain poured down. The icy wind met them from every side. Water dripped from Philip Stephanovitch's hat. In the Ekaterinoslav Street, under the pink glare of the hotel and cinema lights, water foaming out of the waterpipes along the pavement soaked through their thin boots. Umbrellas, mackintoshes, tops of cabs glistened with a black glare. The passers-by bumped into each other and separated with a curse.

"Isabella!" suddenly screamed Philip Stephanovitch in a wild voice, and in terror he pressed close to the cashier. "Isabella, she is there, let us run!"

And actually, overtaking them on the

splashing road, a carriage on pneumatic tires was being driven. In the carriage, lit by the white light of the street lamps, sat Isabella in her pink hat with feathers, resting her heavy body on an under-sized creature with a case under his arm. She was tapping the driver on the back with her green umbrella and ordering in a loud voice, "Drive straight on, turn to the right! My dear, if you have nothing against it we will stay at the Hotel Russia." Her cheeks were flapping with animation, her earrings were dangling about. She looked terrible.

Philip Stephanovitch drew his head down between his shoulders, and jumping sideways over the pools of water began to run for all he was worth down the street, upsetting passers-by and clapping with his loose sole on the pavement.

Loungers in the doorways shouted and laughed as he passed. They were delighted with the sight of his long legs, shrunken jacket, pince-nez covered with dirt, fur hat with dripping brim. Young Ivan could scarcely

follow him. Philip Stephanovitch only came to himself when he reached the station. He was shivering. A feverish flush appeared on his cheeks, his hands trembled, his moustache dripped. He wanted to speak but couldn't, his stubborn tongue seemed to fill his mouth, all it produced was a frightened moan.

The train to Moscow was leaving in the morning. They passed the night at the station in the third-class waiting-room. Philip Stephanovitch sat in a corner, crouching on a rough wooden bench. He was suffocated by a dry, chest-tearing cough. His brain was in a state as though it had been scrubbed with a hard brush, his jaws were clenched as though they might almost press into his eyes, his eyes glared madly, as if not understanding the surroundings. All night through Philip Stephanovitch muttered some unintelligible words in his moustache. At times he would jump up suddenly, grasp young Ivan by the shoulder with his bony fingers and whisper:

"Isabella . . . ssh . . . here she is . . . let us run," and it seemed to him that he could

see Isabella in her pink hat sailing towards him, smiling venomously down the full length of the station, stamping her feet, waving her green umbrella and saying, "My dear, my dear, where are you going, my dear? Now pay for my alimony, my dear!" He hid himself behind the frightened cashier, all trembling, and pressing his finger to his lips whispered with a sly look:

"Ssh . . . she will not see. . . . Ssh . . . I know she will not see!"

Sometimes his face would become normal. Then he would rearrange his pince-nez, and after coughing would say with a persuasive tenderness:

"Wait. We didn't count the cow—cow, one hundred and twenty roubles; the lobsters, seventy-five; the hotel, sixty; fruit, eight. . . . I cannot understand . . ."

In the overcrowded carriage he felt quite ill, but it was impossible to lie down, as they had only bought seats. He was sitting, half leaning in the small space, his head resting on young Ivan's shoulder, his inflamed eyelids

half open, breathing heavily, the breath coming out in whistles through his moustache. Round about there were squealing children, screeching baskets, a rattling teapot. The soles of a pair of heavy nailed boots with a piece of sausage skin sticking to one of them could be seen hanging over the top berth, while clouds of tobacco smoke were circling round and descending. A miserable light shining from behind a wired glass lit up the dull carriage. The rumbling of the wheels seized the head and pressed on the temples. And reigning over all this nightmare of a journey, as though directing it and guiding it with her athletic presence, was a moustached lady in a huge fur coat and smoky glasses. She entered the train at Kharkov and seated herself opposite Philip Stephanovitch, and it at once seemed as though she filled the whole compartment. She was accompanied by an anæmic young man with decayed teeth, striped trousers and butterfly bow. He followed her, fussily dragging a large bag, an enormous umbrella and a rattling teapot. He fussed near her as if at

the foot of a mountain, while she was dusting the dirty floor with her dress and saying in a low, throaty voice:

"Stop fussing about under my feet. Sit down on the seat and sit still. Ugh, dwarf, it is sickening to look at you—I don't know whose rotten likeness you were born with, God forgive me."

"Fie, mamma! How you express yourself before strangers! They will think I don't know what!"

"Don't you dare to keep on talking! Don't dare to call me mamma! What mamma am I to you? It wouldn't be so bad if you were somehow legal, but you are, forgive me, a bastard."

"He, he," tittered the young man, fidgeting with his tie. "You musn't listen to what she says, comrades."

"How do you mean, not listen? Forgive me, please, but do listen, every one of you, and hear how, on account of this imbecile, I have been dragged to the courts for the third year in succession."

The lady put her arms akimbo threateningly, thrust forward her phenomenal bust, which resembled a heart in shape, and staring straight at Philip Stephanovitch through the darkness of her glasses, said in the same deep voice:

"No, listen everybody. And you, young man, listen too!" and she bent her finger on young Ivan's chest. "And you there, on the top berth, and you, ladies. Everybody listen to what tortures I have endured because of this wretched creature here, whom I"—here her voice trembled and soared—"whom I once bore under my heart."

Then she wiped her cheeks with a large handkerchief, blew her nose loudly, and told everybody her long story in detail and in a low voice. It consisted of this—that in her time she had lived as housekeeper to some Poltavian bachelor, a gentleman farmer, a retired cavalry captain, by name Popoff; he was a handsome scoundrel. The retired captain seduced her, and in 1896 the son was born. The handsome scoundrel definitely re-

fused to marry her or to recognise the child, taking no notice of the noble birth of the housekeeper. She swore to have her revenge, but continued, however, to act as his housekeeper. After the revolution the estate was taken over by the State from the retired captain and he was appointed manager. However, although he had become a nonentity, Popoff still refused to atone for his old sin. Then a Soviet law regarding affiliation was passed, and although by that time the son was already thirty years of age and should have been able to fend for himself, the seduced housekeeper decided to appeal to the courts, and not to abandon the case until they had awarded her the allowance for the whole of the thirty years, together with the fine allowed by the regulations and the legal costs. And thus began a wandering from one court to another. She had taken her case from the lowest court to the highest court of appeal; but everywhere she lost. She had been to Petrovski in Kharkov and had shed tears in his waiting-room, but he also had turned her

down. She was now going to Moscow to the very head—Kalinin.

Her voice rumbled like an organ either with thundering lower tones or taking a higher pitch, and her whole story resembled a powerful and disturbing oratorio. She talked for a long time, and during the intervals when she disappeared into the toilet-room the young man would say to his neighbours:

"And mamma is spending all this money quite unnecessarily. I am quite grown up, and it is time I took up a post in a cinema studio."

The lady talked for the whole day and night, talked everyone to absolute dullness. Philip Stephanovitch began to get feverish. There was a terrible drumming in his ears, his liver ached and his heart was palpitating. Wild thoughts galloped through his mind. The voice of the lady filled his ears like deafening cotton-wool. The lady herself seemed to float and spread all over the place before his eyes. She seemed to be balancing in the air a large pink hat with feathers blooming on her head

like a huge flower and earrings dangling in her ears.

"Isabella," whispered Philip Stephanovitch in terror, grabbing young Ivan with his perspiring hands. "Ssh!" And the threatening bass voice beat like a hammer on his temples.

". . . 'Forgive me, madam,' he says, 'but the law has no retrospective effect.' And I asked, 'And the child, has he a retrospective effect?' So I will say to Kalinin himself: 'The child,' I will say, 'comrade, can a child be retrospective? No! Let the scoundrel pay for the affiliation!' . . ."

The torture lasted until morning. They arrived at the station at Moscow at ten o'clock. Philip Stephanovitch could scarcely stand on his feet. Young Ivan looked at him in the pale morning light and was afraid—he looked terrible. They went out into the town. It was frosty and a vicious wind was blowing. The trees were whistling in the station square. The stone pavements of the town were dry. Dust was blowing over the frozen pavement. Citizens with turned-up collars were hastening

to their business. The tramcars were passing, many vans came along, one after the other, carrying goods. Children, some in hoods, were running over the frozen pools towards their schools. Passers-by driving in droshkies with baskets at their feet gazed as in surprise at the crowds in the Moscow streets, lit up by the sober, almost sombre sky.

"Wait," said Philip Stephanovitch, as though he were just coming out of a faint, and he began to fuss about, assuming an expression of superiority. "Wait. Before everything, calmness. Ssh!" And he raised his index finger warningly.

"Now you, young Ivan . . . go straight to the office before you go home. . . . What amount of ready money have we in the drawer to-day? . . . However, that isn't important. . . . What I mean is you must look after them and see they don't muddle it up. . . . And silence! . . . Ssh! Not a word to anybody, as though nothing has happened. . . . You understand? And I will be along immediately. . . . I am only going home to arrange one or

two matters . . . one must prepare a report . . . it is important. . . . Ssh! . . . Not a murmur. . . . Then everything will be covered up. . . . The cow, a hundred and twenty; lobsters, seventy-five; 'Pig Rearing,' four hundred . . . and the overcoat, that's nothing, the air is comparatively warm and I don't feel the air at all without an overcoat. . . . I will go to a tailor at once and order a new overcoat. Just fancy, I feel much better without an overcoat than with one . . . so long as one turns the collar up, everything is all right. So you must go, and I will arrange everything . . . you can rely on me. . . . I will come down about twelve . . . until then . . ."

Young Ivan sadly helped Philip Stephanovitch into the cab. Philip Stephanovitch turned the collar of his jacket up and, gripping it in front, rode away, tumbling forward following his bluish nose.

"Chiefly calmness! No panic! Ssh! And everything will be all right. . . . You can rely on me. . . . I will arrange everything

immediately . . ." said he to himself in a persuasive voice, as he went on his way. "I will do everything at once. Excuse me, what is the date to-day? . . . And Isabella . . . not a kopek . . ." And he put his tongue out craftily behind the cabman.

Young Ivan stood watching his departure for some time, indifferently, then considered for a while, turned, and scraping along the ground with his feet went to the M.U.U.R.

CHAPTER XII AND LAST

BREATHING HEAVILY, Philip Stephanovitch stumbled up the staircase and stopped on the third floor outside the door of his flat. Then he coughed angrily, adjusted his clothes, rubbed his hands together and at last rang four times. Someone ran noisily along the passage at the other side of the door, then there was silence. The door flew open.

"Phil, my dearest Phil, darling," exclaimed a sobbing woman's voice, and then the wife fell on her husband's shoulder.

Putting on a bold face, and coughing, Philip Stephanovitch entered the hall.

"Here I am, Yaninochka," said he, somewhat hastily, stretching out his arms.

She tore herself from his shoulder and moved back unsteadily.

"My God, my God," she whispered, wringing her hands in dismay. "Phil dear! What a state you are in. No goloshes! Where is your

overcoat? How awful! They have been searching for you, they came here for you. My God, what will happen now? Everything has been sold. Zoya goes out washing. We have nothing to eat in the house. I am going quite mad."

"Before everything, calmness," said Philip Stephanovitch haughtily through his nose. "Everything is in order. Young Ivan is there already. Ssh!"

He raised his finger mysteriously and looked round with dazed eyes. Neighbours peeped out from behind doors in the passage. Taking no notice of them, Philip Stephanovitch entered his flat in a business-like manner.

The clean bareness of poverty met him in the corner of the dining-room where the sewing-machine had stood. There were no curtains in the windows, no lamp over the table. But Philip Stephanovitch saw nothing of this. He was consumed with a feverish activity.

On the window-sill sat Kolka, biting his

hand with all his strength in an effort to drive back the tears; his ears were red with shame and his eyes from crying. He gazed in despair into a loud-speaker which he had made from bottles while Philip Stephanovitch had been away. From the loud-speaker came the tones of an ordinary stern-speaking voice, pronouncing with deliberation . . . "comma, we offer to the states, comma, provinces and districts of labour to formulate such rules . . . at the same time local working conditions must be taken into account, full-stop. Next line. During the drafting of these rules, comma . . ."

"Now look here, Nicholas," said Philip Stephanovitch in a business-like tone, "all that is nonsense. We must start at once to prepare a report. Take a piece of paper and a pencil and write it down. You must help your father. I will immediately dictate to you everything in order and then you can copy it. Chiefly—calmness. Write, write . . ."

Philip Stephanovitch began to run round

the table just as he was with his hat on and his case under his arm, gesticulating wildly and muttering:

"Now write: railway tickets, eighty-five; tip, three; cabman, seventeen; lobsters, seventy-five; 'Pig Rearing,' four hundred; the cow, one hundred and twenty. . . . Write, write, we will put everything in order at once. Young Ivan is there already, the chief thing is to hurry."

His wife was standing in the doorway wringing her hands in silence. Kolka was sitting on the window-sill pressing his head with all his might against the pane. Philip Stephanovitch continued running about the room, stumbling over corners of the furniture, wringing his hands and muttering:

"Write, write . . . but wait, this is all nonsense. Now where did I stop? Sorry . . . but the representative turned out to be such a swindler. What do you think about it? Ah, ah; I have eight, he nine. . . ."

Philip Stephanovitch laughed, a dry hoarse laugh, and suddenly became afraid of his own

laugh. He came to himself, looked round with eyes already more sensible and seemed to shrink. His face turned blue. He fingered his long neck weakly.

"Yaninochka," he said in a high-pitched voice, "Yaninochka, I feel ill."

"Phil, darling!"

He put his arm round her broad shoulders, and supporting himself on them went to the bed and lay down, his teeth chattering.

They took him away during the evening.

Early in March, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, the two men were led under escort from the doorway of the Moscow district court. It had been a glorious frosty day. Young Ivan plodded along with turned-up collar and hands thrust into the pockets of his short coat; he was at the side and yet a little in front of Philip Stephanovitch, who could scarcely keep up with him, stumbling on the cobbles. The sharp air caught their breath. Yaninochka and Zoya waited in the street to see Philip Stephanovitch appear. As soon as he

was brought out and led down the middle of the street they began to run along the edge of the pavement, avoiding the heaps of snow and slipping on the slippery parts.

Philip Stephanovitch was dressed in a shabby woman's cape, his head was enveloped like a woman's in a hood tied at the back in a knot. His fur cap, his nose and his beard stood out from the hood. A bottle of greenish-coloured milk dangled in a net-bag from his hand.

Seeing and heeding nothing about him, he walked along, stumbling forward like an old man, twisting his feet and taking short steps as though his legs were wooden fixtures from his bent knees.

The sun was setting behind the blue roofs. The pink clear sky shone behind the towers of the monastery. The rime fell from the white branches of the trees of the boulevard. The crisp snow shouted and crackled under their footfalls. Caretakers were shovelling snow down from the roof of a house. Layers of ice fell from the gutter of the roof, broke into

pieces in the air like white lace and fell down, in blue dust on the pavement below. The rails of the tramway glistened at the bends like sword-blades. Along the road with drums beating passed a company of pioneers. Workmen dressed in short fur jackets were stamping on one foot and then on the other and throwing snowballs at each other. Under the boulevard one caught glimpses of red shawls and faces. Someone was carrying skis on the platform of a tramcar. Loose candies were stuck to the ice-crystalled windows of a sweet-shop. Occasional strains of a brass band could be heard from a side street leading to the Patriarch ponds. The thinnest possible outline of a new moon appeared over the town, and a man was already placing a telescope in position near the Poushkin monument. Flocks of toy balloons—red, blue, green—which were floating over the crowd, gave pleasure to the eyes with their clear colours. The town seemed to breathe with the clean breath of movement.

The comrades reached the corner of Tverskaya Street and saw Nikita.

He ran towards them behind the fence of the boulevard, nodding and making signs. Young Ivan took his hand out of his pocket and stealthily showed to Nikita five outstretched fingers—five years.

Nikita made a long face, shook his head in sympathy. "Five years, I say, oh oh." And then young Ivan understood, as if for the first time, as in a dream, the real meaning of freshness and youth as it moved around him.

Five years!—and he began to think of that amazing, wonderful and inevitable day five years hence when he would come out of prison into liberty.

Thinking of this he smiled, and turning round saw the two women who were running after them on the edge of the pavement: one stout, excited and wiping her face with a kerchief; the other young, slender, in a little orange-coloured knitted hat, in a poor blue coat, no goloshes, frozen, pretty, with frosty wisps of hair, and the tears freezing as they dripped down her glowing cheeks.

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